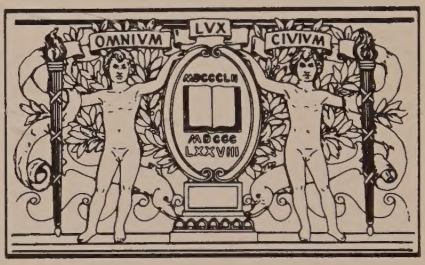
THE MERRY MERRY CUCKOO AND OTHER WELSH PLAYS

JEANNETTE MARKS



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THE MERRY MERRY CUCKOO AND OTHER WELSH PLAYS

THE MERRY MERRY CUCKOO
AND OTHER WELSH PLAYS

BY

JEANNETTE MARKS

AUTHOR OF
"THE SUN CHASER"

NEW YORK . LONDON
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
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Notice for Great Britain

THE MERRY MERRY CUCKOO
THE DEACON'S HAT
WELSH HONEYMOON

All applications for a license to perform these three plays in Great Britain must be addressed to Messrs. Samuel French, Limited, 26 Southampton Street, Strand, W.C. 2, London. No representation may be given unless a license has been obtained.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

THESE WELSH PLAYS
ARE DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY
OF
HELEN FRANCES KIMBALL
Calon wrth Galon

PREFACE

In the production of these plays it is important that the spirit of the Welsh should be understood. The literal carrying out of much detail would, no doubt, help, but more essential is it to "carry out" the Welsh attitude of mind. George Meredith, Welsh by inheritance, wrote in his *Emilia*: "All subtle feelings are discerned by Welsh eyes . . . and I may observe there is human nature and Welsh nature."

Something distinct, unforgettable, there is about Welsh life, whether it be the Welsh personality or the Welsh kitchen! Memorable are the cottage homes of the Cymri, hospitable, warm, cheerful, bright with flowers and the gleam of little, leaded windowpanes, with pewter and shining copper and glittering flitches of bacon and old clocks. Like a well-made person or a well-made play, these cottages have nothing to conceal. Or, at least, they reveal so much beauty that the eye of memory is forever after uncertain where in a Welsh home the sunlight ends and the firelight begins. Uncertain the ear, too, whether the bubble of teakettle or the brisk dialogue of human voices makes the better singing.

Together with the gaiety, the simplicity, the sensitive response, the high-hearted activity—homely art, homely drama always found in Welsh life—is strictness seemingly contradictory. If at times this strictness expresses itself in the harsh ways of rigid Calvinism, as in "The Merry Merry Cuckoo," nevertheless there is behind it a kind of wiriness of the emotions, something sharp, fine, enduring, which has made it possible, despite defeat, and slander, and oppression, for the Welsh to persist.

This "wiriness" of the emotions is, I think, what gives Welsh imagination its resilience, its leap from the ground upwards—a distinction that expresses itself sometimes nationally in song and play, sometimes in quaint personal ways. No adversity has ever been able to crush vitality of feeling out of either national or individual Welsh life. . . . The resilience may become concrete in the persistence and comedy of middle-aged love, as in "A Tress of Hair" or "Love Letters," or in the courage of love in old age, as in either "The Merry Merry Cuckoo" or "Look to the End." . . . I recall three apple-cheeked old women clad in caps and bobbing their curtsies beside a small ancient church. Their hope was pence. To these sweet old souls I explained that a certain door could not be as old as they said it was and contain the big iron nails it held. "Uch," they exclaimed in undismayed chorus, "well indeed, mum, perhaps they were put in later to hold it together!" And whether

it was so or was not so, that door remained the age they said it was, and became a veritable door of the imagination. It is that way, too, with Welsh enchantments, as in "A Welsh Honeymoon"; and death portents, as in "Steppin' Westward." It makes no difference whether these things *are* so, *they become so.*

To approach Welsh life with the large-minded English literalness of a Dr. Samuel Johnson will not suffice. But seeing with the eye of vision as the Welsh do, with gay inconsequence as to material fact and wiry strictness of spirit, it is easy to "stage" these plays, bright in color as some age-old unfaded missal, and clear as holy doctrine says every message should be. When the mind tells us all is clear, nothing is puzzling — not even the Welsh saint in so cheery a state he falls into his own holy well, escaping drowning merely by the good luck known to attend unholy conditions!

Whether it be some rascally old deacon like the deacon in "The Deacon's Hat," or some pious revivalist who smites his breast in self-condemnatory woe at the name of Judas, much current Welsh superstition, despite its smack of folly, is wise in its emphasis on the power of the imagination. One may share a little the opinion of that youth who when he first saw the Lady of the Lake thought she was a goose. Probably she was a goose—from the masculine point of view she usually is. But by changing the double *o* in goose to *a-n* in gander, the goose family

— to say nothing of the human! — is well on towards perpetuating itself and towards happiness. . . . The Welsh habit of mind — not unlike the American — is full of humorous, kindly contradiction between the body and the soul of things; and it is vivid in dialogue, lively with well-strung action.

Jeannette Marks.

Attic Peace,
Mount Holyoke College,
South Hadley, Massachusetts.

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PRONUNCIATION OF WELSH NAMES

1 *ch* has, roughly, the same sound as in German or in the Scotch *loch*.
2 *dd* = English *th*, roughly, in bre*a*the.
3 *e* has, roughly, the sound of *ai* in d*ai*ry.
4 *f* = English *v*.
5 *ff* = English sharp *f*.
6 *ll* represents a sound intermediate between *the* and *fl*.
7 *w* as a consonant is pronounced as in English; as a vowel = *oo*.
8 *y* is sometimes like *u* in b*u*t, sometimes like *ee* in gr*ee*n.

NOTE: *The author will gladly answer questions about pronunciation, costuming, etc., etc.*

THE MERRY MERRY CUCKOO

CHARACTERS

ANNIE, the wife of David.
DAVID.
LOWRY PRICHARD } two neighbors.
GUTO PRICHARD }
MORRIS, a young minister.

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ACT I

A garden. Cottage at back running from right to center. A group of three windows in the shape of a bay, showing a bed inside and an old man lying on it. A door leads into cottage. A gate in fence on the right side leads to the road and village beyond. All of the left side of stage a garden and orchard, with a path through it to a gate in wall at back; garden wall to left, at back over it village chapel from which the church music comes.

A thatched cottage with whitewashed walls. Ivy is growing about the doorway, and hanging from the thatch above the door; fuchsia bushes on either side of door; trees to the left in garden, including holly and yew; green grass; mountains beyond cottage and garden and chapel. In the foreground, to right by cottage door, is a washtub.

It is about six o'clock, the first Monday in April. Towards end of act the sun sets.

At rise of curtain, windows of the cottage closed, and Annie, old, very plump, with sparse gray hair escaping from under her white cap and damp on her forehead from work, and wearing a short skirt, apron, fichu over shoulders, clogs on her feet, is washing. Church music off left continues a minute after rise of curtain. David calls out. Annie leaves the tub and hurries to the windows to open them from the outside. David, a very old man, with white hair and thin face, is seen lying in bed.

DAVID (*calling*)

Annie, Annie!

ANNIE (*opening windows*)

Aye, lad dear, I was listenin' for ye; yiss, yiss, an' expectin' ye to call.

DAVID (*sleepily*)

I was dreamin' an' — dear, dear, what a dream! It seemed like fifty years ago when we were married, an', you remember, we stood out there in the garden that first night. Are there any violets bloomin' yet?

ANNIE

Not yet, Davy lad.

DAVID

An' the marsh marigolds?

ANNIE

I'm thinkin' they're sure to be out.

DAVID

An' that same night, Annie, do ye remember we heard the cuckoo singin'?

ANNIE

Aye, lad darlin', fifty years ago this comin' week, an' a cuckoo singin' to us every spring since then. (*Annie takes a tumbler from the sill and gives him a spoonful of medicine*) Take this, dear; there, 'twill be makin' ye better.

DAVID (*taking medicine*)

An' well?

ANNIE

Yiss, yiss, better.

DAVID

But the cuckoo, will the cuckoo be singin' soon?

ANNIE (*words inconclusive*)

Lad, dear, no more, or ye'll be havin' an attack an' — Dear people, chapel is out, an' I hear them on the road!

DAVID (*plaintively*)

The Monday meetin'. Why have ye not been?

ANNIE

Work is keepin' me home, lad.

DAVID

But, Annie, ye've not said a word of the cuckoo.

ANNIE (*sending her voice up as cheerfully as she can*)

Aye, the cuckoo; yiss, the cuckoo —

DAVID (*clasping and unclasping his hands*)

Has it come? Did ye hear it?

ANNIE (*gulping*)

David, dear, if ye'd but listen to what I was a-goin' to say. I was a-goin' to say that I've not heard the cuckoo yet, but that everythin's over-early this spring in Wales, an' I'm expectin' to hear one any time now. 'Tis so warm there might be one singin' at dusk to-day — there might be!

DAVID (*brightening*)

Might there be, Annie?

ANNIE (*smoothing his head with her hand*)

Aye, lad. Hush, lad, they're singin' in the chapel!

[*She stands there with one hand resting on his forehead, listening to the singing of Penlan, a hymn by David Jenkins. When the music stops, she moves away.*

DAVID

Tis over-early, an', Annie —

ANNIE

Davy dear, be still! Pastor Morris says — Tut, tut, I'll close the window, for there comes that Lowry Prichard and her man.

[*Annie closes windows hastily and goes back to her washing. Enter from right Lowry and her husband*

Guto, coming from the Monday prayer meeting and carrying hymnals. Lowry dressed in Welsh costume, clogs, short full skirt, striped apron, white sleeves from elbow to wrist, tight bodice, shawl over her shoulders, white cap, and tall, Welsh beaver hat. Guto, Welsh beaver hat on like his wife's, striped vest, brass buttons on lapels of black cloth coat, long, somewhat tight trousers. At sight of washtub and Annie busy over it, Lowry and Guto make gestures of shocked dismay to each other.

LOWRY

Good evenin', Annie Dalben.

ANNIE (*wiping her wet hand on her apron*)

Good evenin', Lowry Prichard, an' to you, Guto.

GUTO

Good evenin', mum.

LOWRY

How is your man?

ANNIE

He's no better.

LOWRY

Is he worse?

ANNIE

Nay.

LOWRY

We missed ye, Annie Dalben.

GUTO

Aye, we did. Why were ye not at meetin'?

ANNIE

I've my man to mind these days.

LOWRY (*triumphantly*)

But ye said he was no worse, ye did.

ANNIE

Aye, I did, but I cannot leave him alone.

GUTO

But ye're neglectin' chapel an' forgettin' the Lord, Annie Dalben. Ye'll go quite on the downfall, like this.

LOWRY

Aye, ye've not been to meetin's, an' 'tis bad when he's dyin' for ye to forget your Lord. Is he in there?

ANNIE (*moving protectingly nearer the closed window*)

Yiss.

LOWRY

Why were ye washin'?

ANNIE

Ye've no cause to ask that — ye know. Except I did the washin', what would there be for me to care for David with — now that he needs me?

GUTO

Yiss, but ye could do it on some other day.

ANNIE

Nay, for the ladies are waitin' now for what they've given me to do — an' they so kind.

LOWRY

I see Pastor Morris comin' in.

ANNIE

Aye, he's comin' every day an' some days bringin' me the food from his own table for my man.

[*Enter Pastor Morris, young, earnest and rather severe because of his youth.*

LOWRY (*the inquisitional look on her face deepening, and her voice growing more shrill, pointing to Annie*)

Ye see, sir, what Annie Dalben's been doin' while

we were in meetin.' She's needin' a sermon, aye, that she is.

GUTO

She's goin' quite on the downfall, sir.

ANNIE

Lowry Prichard, ye've no cause to speak so about me. When was I ever absent when my man was well? But now, sir, (*turning to Morris*) as ye know, he's ill an' needin' me an' all the s'illin's I can earn. I cannot go away from him.

LOWRY (*speaking to Pastor Morris*)

She's needin' your advice, sir. 'Tis that she is needin' whatever. Warn her well.

GUTO

Yiss, an' rebuke her.

LOWRY

Ye're young, sir, but ye're the instrument of the Lord whatever. 'Tis your duty to bring her back to her conscience.

GUTO

Amen.

[*Lowry and Guto go off very self-righteous and looking triumphantly at Annie, who, quiet, her face pale and weary, turns to her washing and rubs and rinses diligently while the minister is talking.*

MORRIS (*gently*)

I've been troubled, for I knew that it would come to this, Annie. I should have spoken with you before about going to chapel. Some one could be found to stay with David while you were at meeting. You have not been to chapel for a month, Annie.

ANNIE (*continuing her work but in her voice the attitude of the older woman towards the young man*)
Ye're very kind, sir, to take the interest, but I'm thinkin' ye cannot understand. There's been no occasion, sir, for ye to understand through what I've been goin' these days.
[*She rubs her sleeve across her tear-filled eyes and continues washing sturdily.*

MORRIS
Yes, but, Annie, what is David thinking? Does he want you to stay away from the meetings where you have always been together?

ANNIE
Nay, sir.

MORRIS
Has he spoken of your staying away?

ANNIE (*reluctantly*)
Aye, sir, he asked this evenin' why I was not in meetin'.

MORRIS (*reflectively*)
He did. Well, I am thinking that —

ANNIE (*dropping her work and speaking as if worried*)
Nay, sir, I've no cause to excuse myself to ye — ye're naught but a lad. 'Tis past your knowledge how my man is everythin' to me — everythin', he is. He's been such a husband as no one but myself can know, thinkin' of me all the time, livin' for me, as gentle an' tender to me as if I had been a child, an' now, sir, he's ill — he may be dyin', an' I can think of nothin' but doin' everythin' for — (*David taps on window and Annie turns to open it*) Aye, lad dear. 'Tis the Pastor comin' to see ye again.

DAVID (*smiling and holding out one weak old hand*)
Good evenin', sir, such a grand day, with spring everywhere. We've been expectin' the cuckoo, sir — the wife and I. Have ye heard the cuckoo, yet, Annie?

MORRIS (*starting to speak*)
'Twill be a fortnight be—

ANNIE (*interrupting hurriedly*)
Nay, lad dear, I've been busy, but I'm thinkin' I'm likely to hear it now any moment — aye, any moment.

MORRIS
But, Annie, the cuckoo doesn't —

ANNIE
Tut, sir, I could almost promise the cuckoo would be singin' at sundown whatever — aye, indeed, lad darlin'. Now I'll —

DAVID (*interrupting*)
Annie, ye mind that baby cuckoo we saw the skylark a-feedin' that first spring in Blaen Cwm? It all comes back so clear now an' clearer every moment. I'd not once thought of it, sir, since then.

MORRIS
But, David, the —

ANNIE (*speaking to David and closing the windows*)
Lie down, lad darlin', an' be quiet. I'll call ye, if the cuckoo sings.

[*In the distance the choir can be heard practising Cariad, a revival hymn, in the chapel. Continues until Annie is alone and talking to herself.*

MORRIS (*severely*)
But, Annie, you know the cuckoo will not sing at

least for another fortnight. It is mid-April before the cuckoo sings.

ANNIE (*wearily*)

Aye, sir.

MORRIS

Why did you say that to David?

ANNIE

He's achin', sir, to hear the cuckoo sing, an' I'm wantin' to comfort him.

MORRIS

But, Annie, it is a lie to say what you did to him.

ANNIE (*vigorously*)

Aye, sir, but I'm not carin' whatever.

MORRIS (*severely*)

Not caring about telling a lie?

ANNIE

Nay, sir, I'm not carin' about anythin' but makin' him happy.

MORRIS (*rebukingly*)

Annie! (*Annie continues washing and does not reply*) Annie! Well, indeed, Annie, if there is nothing I can do for you, and you will not listen to me, I must be going to choir practice. I promised to be there this evening.

ANNIE (*without turning from the tub*)

Aye, sir. (*Pastor Morris off through garden path to choir practice. Goes to left. Annie continues washing until he is well out of sight. She stands up straight and looks about the garden*) He's wantin' to hear the cuckoo more nor anythin' else, dear, dear! Everywhere 'tis green now, an' the lilies will be here before

long — but lad, lad, the cuckoo, will it come? (*She goes to left into garden, the wet clothes in a basket under her arm, and stands there, looking about*) 'Twas over there it laid its egg in the robin's nest this year ago in May — aye, an' one poor little bird pushed the other out, an' ye picked it up, lad dear, an' were so tender with it. An' they're not wantin' ye, Davy, my old lad darlin', to think the cuckoo will be singin' soon. Dear God, is there to be no cuckoo singin' for the lad again? Just once more, dear God, to sing to him and comfort him? Aye! just the one song? No cuckoo? Aye, there will be a cuckoo singin', there shall be a cuckoo singin'! (*She looks towards the closed windows behind which David lies, and puts down her basket of clothes*) He's asleep! Hush, I'll be the cuckoo! He'll wake an' think the spring has really come. Here by this tree. They're in the chapel, an' they'll never know. (*Throughout this scene, until Lowry speaks, a cuckoo song is being played very softly. And it is into a few notes of this, several times repeated, that Annie swings when she actually sings her cuckoo song. She opens her mouth to begin, a look of appealing misery on her face*) 'Twas somethin' like this: *Coo-o. Coo-o!* Tut, that sounds like a hen. I know, it goes over an' over again, sing-song, sing-song, like this: *cu-cu, cu-cu.* Aye, that's better. (*She rocks herself backwards and forwards practising it and repeating cu-cu, cu-cu*) 'Tis growin' better, but lad, lad, I'm plannin' to deceive ye whatever! (*Brushes tears away impatiently and begins song again*) *Cucu-cu, cucu-cu, cucucu-cu, cu!* Aye, that's fair; aye, 'tis fine! He'll not know me from a

real cuckoo. I'll try it loud now, for ye've no long, dearie.

[*She holds eagerly on to tree beside her, so lost in the cuckoo music that she is not aware of a head popping up behind the garden wall and down again. She draws a long breath and begins, softly, slowly, the song sounding as if it came from a distance. She waits a moment, — the heads are well above the wall now in amazement, — and then sings more loudly, making the song sound as if it came from the garden where she is standing.*

DAVID (*calling*)

Annie!

ANNIE (*hurrying to open his windows*)

Aye, lad dear, I'm comin'.

DAVID (*ecstatically*)

Annie, Annie, dear, I heard the cuckoo singin'; I was dreamin' again, an' all at once I heard the cuckoo singin' in the garden, loud and clear. It sang three times; first, it sounded like somethin' else, 'twas so breathless; then it sang quiet an' sweet like a cuckoo; an' the third time it seemed comin' from the old mill wheel.

ANNIE

But, lad darlin', ye've heard it, an' I'm that glad! Three times; yiss, yiss, 'tis a real fine cuckoo. Now ye're happy, darlin', an' ye'll sleep well upon it.

DAVID (*disappointedly*)

Did ye no hear it?

ANNIE

I'm thinkin' I did an' thinkin' I didn't.

DAVID

Where were ye?

ANNIE

Out in the garden, hangin' out the clothes.

DAVID (*still more disappointedly*)

An' ye didn't hear it?

ANNIE

I'm no certain, darlin'; I heard somethin' — I did, indeed.

DAVID (*proudly*)

'Twas the cuckoo, Annie dear; I'm hearin' it first every year; ye must be growin' deaf.

ANNIE

Yiss, yiss. Now go to sleep, an' I'll call ye if I hear the cuckoo sing.

DAVID

Will it sing again?

ANNIE

Aye, darlin', if ye heard it once, 'tis sure to sing again.

DAVID

I'll be gettin' well, Annie, is it not so?

ANNIE (*turning away suddenly*)

Indeed, lad dear, ye'll be about among the heather 'fore long.

DAVID (*speaking quietly, almost to himself*)

To think the cuckoo's singin' — singin' for me!

ANNIE

Aye, aye; now go to sleep.

[*He lies back and closes his eyes obediently. Annie, drying her eyes on her apron, goes to left towards her basket of clothes. She stands by the tree where she had sung the cuckoo song for David, unconscious that two people are head and shoulders above the garden wall, looking at her.*

LOWRY (*in a loud voice*)

So ye've come back, Annie Dalben, to sing the cuckoo again.

GUTO

Aye, we heard ye singin' the cuckoo.

LOWRY

Pooh, 'tis a pretty cuckoo ye make, an old woman like you, an' a pretty song!

ANNIE

Lowry Prichard, have a care!

GUTO

'Tis over-early for the cuckoo, is it not?

ANNIE

Yiss.

GUTO

An' what are ye singin' in your garden for, an' David dyin'?

[*Annie does not reply but stoops to her basket of clothes and begins to hang them out.*

LOWRY

So ye'll give no answer? Well, indeed, maybe ye'll answer Pastor Morris. Aye, Guto, go fetch the Pastor.

[*Guto goes off to left, through garden gate in garden wall.*

LOWRY (*going towards the windows behind which David lies*)

'Tis a godly song ye've sung, Annie, an' a tale for the chapel, eh?

ANNIE (*following and stepping in front of Lowry*)

Ye may go out of this garden, an' that this minute!

LOWRY (*making her way nearer and nearer the window*)
Nay, nay, I'm a-goin' to speak with David an' tell him he's a cuckoo for a wife. Tut, ye look fair crazy, Annie, crazy with wrath! Your hair is all rumpled, an' your smock is dirty. David, bein' a cuckoo is —

[*But the taunt is left unfinished, for at that moment young Morris comes in hastily, Guto following.*

MORRIS (*authoritatively*)
Annie! Lowry! Annie, is this I hear true? Have you been imitating the cuckoo?

ANNIE
Aye, sir.

MORRIS (*turning to Lowry and Guto*)
You may go. Leave this to me.

[*Guto and Lowry go off right, through front gate, staring in at David as they pass.*

MORRIS (*sternly*)
So, Annie, you have been acting the cuckoo — acting a lie. With this lie upon you, how will it be with salvation?

ANNIE (*hotly*)
Salvation, sir? I've no mind to your salvation; no, nor to heaven's, if the Lord makes this singin' a lie! I'm thinkin' of David as I've thought of him these fifty years, years before ye were born, sir, an' if a lie will make him happy when he's dyin', then I'm willin' to lie, an' do it every minute of the day.

MORRIS
That means you are willing to sin?

ANNIE
Aye, sir, to sin. I'm a willin' sinner!

MORRIS (*more gently*)

You are overwrought, Annie.

ANNIE (*wearily*)

Ye're all against me, sir.

MORRIS

Nay, nay, but wouldn't it be better if I were to tell David about the cuckoo?

ANNIE (*sobbing*)

Oh, no, no, no, sir! Not that!

MORRIS (*stretching out his hand to comfort her*)

Annie, there, there, you mustn't cry so.

ANNIE

'Tis all the happiness he's got, an' he's goin'. Oh, my lad, my lad!

MORRIS

There, there, Annie!

ANNIE

We've been married fifty years this spring, an' every spring we've listened for the cuckoo an' not one missed. An' now he's a-dyin' an' a-wantin' to hear it so, an' 'twas over-early, an' then I thought of bein' the cuckoo myself. Oh, Davy, Davy darlin'!

MORRIS (*altogether forgetting his pastoral severity*)

There, Annie, there, dear, tell me about it! We'll see, Annie.

ANNIE

There's no more. Only he kept askin' about the spring, the violets an' marsh marigolds, an' I knew all the time he was thinkin' of the cuckoo an' not askin' because he was goin' an' mightn't hear it. An' then he did. An' I said I thought he'd hear one this

evenin', that everythin' was over-early whatever. After that he seemed happier than I'd seen him, an' I closed his windows an' went off into the garden to practise it. I worked at it till I could do it fair. Oh, Davy, Davy lad!

MORRIS

Now, Annie dear, don't cry, just tell me more.

ANNIE

Then, sir, I sang the song here by this tree, an' when he called me to him, there was such a look of joy on his face as has not been there this long time. 'Tis the last happiness I can give him, sir.

DAVID (*calling*)

Annie, Annie!

ANNIE

He's callin'. Aye, lad dear, I'm comin'.

[*She goes into cottage and, after opening all the windows, stands by the foot of David's bed.*

DAVID

Have ye heard the cuckoo singing'?

ANNIE

No, not yet. It must be singin' again soon.

DAVID (*anxiously*)

Ye're sure 'tis *goin'* to sing?

ANNIE (*gathering him up and turning his pillow*)

Indeed, yiss, an' with the windows all open, ye'll be hearin' it fine an' clear, ye will. I'll go back up into the garden to see is the cuckoo there.

DAVID

Will it be singin' over an' over again, the way it did that first time?

ANNIE

Aye, I'm thinkin' so, lad darlin'. Ye must listen quietly.

DAVID

'Twas so beautiful singin'. I'd like hearin' it with ye here beside me.

ANNIE (*kissing him*)

I'll come back, lad.

DAVID.

Aye, I'll be waitin' for ye.

[*Annie goes out of the cottage door and back into garden where Pastor Morris is standing, his hat off, while Annie and David are talking together. He can see them both, but David cannot see him. Annie and Morris converse in whispers. The cuckoo song begins to be played softly.*

MORRIS

Is he worse?

ANNIE (*looking at Morris beseechingly*)

I cannot tell, sir, but he's longin' to hear the cuckoo sing again.

MORRIS

I see and you are wishing to do it again?

ANNIE

Yiss, an' with the lad dyin', can ye tell me not to do what Davy is askin' for? Each time might be his last, sir.

MORRIS (*after a moment's hesitation*)

Nay, go sing for him. I will stand guard for you, and no one shall disturb you.

ANNIE (*a deep sigh of relief*)

Oh, sir, thank you! 'Tis sure to be a comfort. But ye're harmin' your conscience for me, sir, areye?

MORRIS (*humbly*)

I'm not saying, Annie; I'm over-young to have a conscience in some things.

ANNIE (*taking his hand to kiss it*)

May God bless ye, sir, for bein' kind to an old woman!

[*The sun has set behind the Chapel, and it is rapidly growing dark as the music grows louder. Morris steps back to the garden gate to keep watch. Annie stands by the tree and, dropping her hands by her side, lifting her head, and swaying her old body to and fro, sings the cuckoo song over and over again three times. David has risen in bed, an expression of rapturous delight upon his face as he leans against the casement listening. The lights are being lighted in the chapel, and the chapel bell begins to ring.*

DAVID (*calling faintly*)

Annie, Annie darlin', come quickly, the cuckoo's singin'!

ANNIE (*hastening towards him*)

Yiss, lad, I'm comin'.

DAVID (*stretching out his hands towards her*)

Annie, sweetheart, did ye *hear* the cuckoo singin'?

ANNIE

Yiss, dearie, loud and clear.

DAVID (*trying to imitate its song while his voice grows fainter*)

It sang over an' over like this —

ANNIE (*within the cottage and beside David*)

Yiss, dear, I see.

DAVID (*sinking back into her arms*)

An' — it — was — quiet — but — Annie —

ANNIE (*holding him to her and crying out*)

Lad, lad dear, Davy, can ye not speak to me?

[*The bell for chapel stops ringing. The organ playing "Jesus, Lover of my Soul" is heard. Morris is standing by the gate, facing towards the old people, his hat off, his head bowed.*

CURTAIN

THE DEACON'S HAT

CHARACTERS

Deacon Roberts, a stout, oldish Welshman.

Hugh Williams, an earnest visionary young man who owns Y Gegin.

Neli Williams, his capable wife.

Mrs. Jones, the Wash, a stout kindly woman who wishes to buy soap.

Mrs. Jenkins, the Midwife, after pins for her latest baby.

Tom Morris, the Sheep, who comes to buy tobacco and remains to pray.

All applications for a license to perform this play in Great Britain must be addressed to Messrs. Samuel French, Limited, 26 Southampton Street, Strand, W.C. 2, London. No representation may be given unless a license has been obtained.

THE DEACON'S HAT

SCENE: *A little shop called Y Gegin (The Kitchen) in Bala, North Wales.*

TIME: *Monday morning at half-past eleven.*

To the right is the counter of Y Gegin, set out with a bountiful supply of groceries; behind the counter are grocery-stocked shelves. Upon the counter is a good-sized enamel-ware bowl filled with herring pickled in brine and leek, also a basket of fresh eggs, a jar of pickles, some packages of codfish, a half dozen loaves of bread, a big round cheese, several pounds of butter wrapped in print paper, etc., etc.

To the left are a cheerful glowing fire and ingle.

At the back center is a door; between the door and the fire stands a grandfather's clock with a shining brass face. Between the clock and the door, back center, is a small tridarn [Welsh dresser] and a chair. From the rafters hang flitches of bacon, hams, bunches of onions, herbs, etc. On either side of the fireplace are latticed windows, showing a glimpse of the street. Before the fire is a small, round three-legged table, beside it a tall straight-backed chair.

Between the table and left is a door which is the entrance to Y Gegin and from which, on a metal elbow, dangles a large bell.

At rise of curtain Hugh Williams enters at back center, absorbed in reading a volume of Welsh theological essays. He is dressed in a brightly striped vest, a short, heavy

cloth coat, cut away in front and with lapels trimmed with brass buttons, swallowtails behind, also trimmed with brass buttons, stock wound around his neck, and tight trousers down to his boot tops.

Neli Williams, his wife, a comely, capable young woman, busy with her knitting every instant she talks, is clad in her market costume, a scarlet cloak and a tall black Welsh beaver. Over her arm is an immense basket.

NELI (*commandingly*)

Hughie, put down that book!

HUGH (*still going on reading*)

Haven't I just said a man is his own master, whatever!

NELI

Hughie, ye're to mind the shop while I'm gone!

HUGH (*patiently*)

Yiss, yiss.

NELI

I don't think ye hear a word I am sayin' whatever.

HUGH

Yiss, I hear every word ye're sayin'.

NELI

What is it then?

HUGH (*weakly*)

'T is all about — about — the — the weather whatever!

NELI

Ye've not heard a word, an' ye're plannin' to read that book from cover to cover, I can see.

HUGH (*a little too quickly*)

Nay, I have no plans . . .

[*He tucks book away in back coat pocket over-hastily.*

NELI
Hugh!

HUGH (*weakly*)
Nay, I *have* no plans whatever!

NELI (*reproachfully*)
Hugh—*ie*! 'T would be the end of sellin' anythin' to anybody if I leave ye with a book whatever! Give me that book!

HUGH (*obstinately*)
Nay, I'll no read the book.

NELI
Give me that book!

HUGH (*rising a little*)
Nay. I say a man is his own master whatever!

NELI (*finding the book hidden in his coat-tail pocket*)
Is he? Well, I'll no leave ye with any masterful temptations to be readin'.

HUGH
Ye've no cause to take this book away from me.

NELI (*opens book and starts with delight*)
'Tis Deacon Roberts's new book on "The Flamin' Wickedness of Babylon." Where did ye get it?

HUGH (*reassured by her interest*)
He lent it to me this morning.

NELI (*resolutely*)
Well, I will take it away from ye this noon till I am home again whatever!

HUGH (*sulkily*)
Sellin' groceries is not salvation. They sold groceries in Babylon; Deacon Roberts says so.

NELI (*looking at book with ill-disguised eagerness*)

I dunno as anybody ever found salvation by givin' away all he had for nothin'! 'Tis certain Deacon Roberts has not followed that way.

HUGH (*still sulkily*)

A man is his own master, I say.

NELI (*absent-mindedly, her nose in the book*)

Is he? Well, indeed!

HUGH (*crossly*)

Aye, he is. (*Pointedly*) An' I was not plannin' to give away the book whatever.

NELI (*closing volume with a little sigh as for stolen delights and speaking busily*)

An' I am not talkin' about acceptin' books but about butter an' eggs an' cheese an' all the other groceries!

HUGH

Aye, ye'll get no blessin' from such worldliness.

NELI (*absent-mindedly*)

Maybe not, but ye will get a dinner from that unblessed worldliness an' find no fault, I'm thinkin'. (*Her hand lingering on the book which she opens*) But such wonderful theology! An' such eloquence! Such an understandin' of sin! Such glowin' pictures of Babylon!

HUGH

Aye, hot! I tell ye, Neli, there's no man in the parish has such a gift of eloquence as Deacon Roberts or such theology. In all Wales ye'll not find stronger theology than his.

NELI

Ye have no need to tell me that! (*Looking for a place in which to hide the book until she returns*) Have

I not a deep an' proper admiration for theology? Have I not had one minister an' five deacons an' a revivalist in my family, to say nothin' at all of one composer of hymns?

HUGH

Yiss, yiss. Aye, 't is a celebrated family. I am no sayin' anythin' against your family.

NELI

Then what?

HUGH (*pleadingly*)

Deacon Roberts has great fire with which to save souls. We're needin' that book on Babylon's wickedness. Give it back to me, Neli!

NELI

Oh, aye! (*Looks at husband*) I'm not sayin' but that ye are wicked, Hugh, an' needin' these essays, for ye have no ministers and deacons and hymn composers among your kin.

HUGH (*triumphantly*)

Aye, aye, that's it! That's it! An' the more need have I to read till my nostrils are full of the smoke of — of Babylon.

NELI (*absent-mindedly tucking book away on shelf as she talks*)

Aye, but there has been some smoke about Deacon Roberts's reputation which has come from some fire less far away than Babylon.

HUGH

What smoke?

NELI (*evasively*)

Well, I am thinkin' about my eggs which vanished one week ago to-day. There was no one in that

mornin' but Deacon Roberts. Mrs. Jones the Wash had come for her soap an' gone before I filled that basket with eggs.

HUGH (*watching her covertly, standing on tiptoe and craning his neck as she stows away book*)

Yiss, yiss!

NELI (*slyly*)

Ask Deacon Roberts if cats steal eggs whatever?

HUGH (*repeating*)

If cats steal eggs, if cats steal eggs.

NELI

Aye, not if eggs steal cats.

HUGH (*craning neck*)

Yiss, yiss, if eggs steal cats!

NELI

Hugh—*ie!* Now ye'll never get it correct again! 'T is if cats steal eggs.

HUGH (*sulkily*)

Well, I'm no carin' about cats with heaven starin' me in the face.

[*Neli turns about swiftly with the quick sudden motions characteristic of her, and Hugh shrinks into himself. She shakes her finger at him and goes over to kiss him.*

NELI

Hughie lad, ye're not to touch the book while I am gone to market.

HUGH

Nay, nay, certainly not!

NELI

And ye're to be on the lookout for Mrs. Jones the Wash, for Mrs. Jenkins the Midwife — Jane Elin has a new baby, an' it'll be needin' somethin'. (*Point-*

ing to counter) Here is everythin' plainly marked. Ye're no to undersell or give away anythin'. D' ye hear?

HUGH

Aye, I hear!

NELI

An' remember where the tobacco is, for this is the day Tom Morris the Sheep comes in.

HUGH

Aye, in the glass jar.

NELI

Good-by. I will return soon.

HUGH (*indifferently*)

Good-by.

[*Neli leaves by door at back center. Immediately Hugh steals towards the shelves where she hid the book.*

NELI (*thrusting head back in*)

Mind, Hughie lad, no readin' — nay, not even any theology!

HUGH (*stepping quickly away from shelves and repeating parrot-like*)

Nay, nay, no readin', no sermons, not even any theology!

NELI

An' no salvation till I come back!

[*She smiles, withdraws head, and is gone. Hugh starts forward, collides clumsily with the counter in his eagerness, knocks the basket of eggs with his elbow, upsetting it. Several eggs break. He shakes his head ruefully at the mess and as ruefully at the counter. He finds book and hugs it greedily to him.*

HUGH (*mournfully*)

Look at this! What did I say but that there was no salvation sellin' groceries! If Neli could but see those eggs! (*He goes behind counter and gets out a box of eggs, from which he re-fills the basket. The broken eggs he leaves untouched upon the floor. He opens his volume of sermons and seats himself by a little three-legged table near the fire. He sighs in happy anticipation. Hearing a slight noise, he looks suspiciously at door, gets up, tiptoes across floor to street door, and locks it quietly. An expression of triumph overspreads his face*) Da, if customers come, they will think no one is at home whatever, an' I can read on! (*He seats himself at little three-legged table, opens volume, smooths over its pages lovingly, and begins to read slowly and halting over syllables*) The smoke of Ba-by-lon was hot — scorchin' hot. An' 'twas filled with Ba-ba-ba-baal stones, slimy an' scorchin' hot also — [*There is the sound of feet coming up the shop steps, followed by a hand trying the door knob. Hugh looks up from his sermons, an expression of innocent triumph on his face. The door knob is tried again, the door rattled.*

Then some one rings the shop doorbell.

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*calling*)

Mrs. Williams, mum, have ye any soap? (*No answer. Calling*) Mrs. Williams! Mrs. Williams!

[*Hugh nods approvingly and lifts his volume to read.*

MRS. JONES THE WASH

Where are they all whatever? I will just look in at the window. (*A large kindly face is anxiously flattened against the window. At that Hugh drops in con-*

sternation under the three-legged table) Uch, what's that shadow skippin' under the table? No doubt a rat after the groceries. Mrs. Williams, mum, Mrs. Williams! Well, indeed they're out.

[*She pounds once more on the door with a heavy fist, rings, and then goes. Suddenly the door back center opens, and Neli Williams appears.*

NELI (*she does not see Hugh and peers around for him*) What is all that bell-ringing about?

[*Hugh crawls out from under table.*

HUGH

Hush, she' gone!

NELI (*amazed and whispering to herself*)

Under the table!

HUGH (*rising and putting up his hand as a sign for her to keep silent*)

Nay, 't was Mrs. Jones the Wash come to buy her soap whatever!

NELI

Aye, well, why didn't she come in whatever?

HUGH (*whispering*)

I locked the door, Neli, so I could finish readin' those essays whatever! An' then she looked in at the window, an' I had to get under the table.

NELI (*indignantly*)

Locked the door against a customer, an' after all I said! An' crawled under a table! Hugh Williams, your wits are goin' quite on the downfall!

HUGH (*in a whisper*)

Aye, but Neli, those essays — an' I thought ye had gone to market.

NELI

I had started, but I came back for my purse. Put down that book!

HUGH

Aye, but, Neli —

NELI (*angrily*)

Much less of heaven an' much more of earth is what I need in a husband! Ye have sent away a customer; very like Mrs. Jones the Wash after soap will go elsewhere.

HUGH

Aye, but, Neli . . .

[*Steps are heard approaching.*

NELI

Get up! Some one is coming.

[*Hugh gets up very unwillingly.*

HUGH (*whispering still*)

Aye, but, Neli . . .

NELI (*angrily*)

Put down that book, I say! (*She crunches over some eggshells*) Eggs? Broken?

HUGH (*putting down book*)

Aye, Neli, my elbow an' the eggs in Babylon . . .

NELI (*sarcastically*)

Aye, I see beasts in Babylon here together, — doleful creatures smearin' one an' sixpence worth of eggs all over the floor. An' a half dozen eggs gone last week. (*Wiping up eggs*) An' I'm to suppose Babylon had something to do with that half dozen eggs, too? They were put in the basket after Mrs. Jones the Wash had left whatever, an' before Deacon Roberts came.

HUGH
Neli, I did not say . . .

NELI (*still angrily*)
Well, indeed, unlock that door!

HUGH (*going to unlock door*)
But, Neli . . .

NELI (*disappearing through door back center*)
Not a word! Your mind has gone quite on the downfall — lockin' doors against your own bread and butter an' soap.

HUGH (*unlocking door sullenly*)
But, Neli, salvation an' soap . . .

NELI (*snappily*)
Salvation an' soap are as thick as thieves.

HUGH
But, Neli, a man is his own master.

NELI
Yiss, I see he is!

[*Neli goes out, slamming door noisily.*

HUGH
Dear anwyl, she seems angry!

[*Hugh opens street door left just as Neli goes out through kitchen, by door back center. Deacon Roberts enters the door Hugh has unlocked. He looks at Hugh, smiles, and goes over to counter in a businesslike way. He is a stout man, dressed in a black broadcloth cutaway coat, tight trousers, a drab vest, high collar and stock, woollen gloves, a muffler wound about his neck and face, and a tall Welsh beaver hat. Under his arm he carries a book.*

DEACON ROBERTS (*speaking affectionately, pulling off his gloves, putting down book on counter, and beginning eagerly to touch the various groceries*)

Essays on Babylon to-day, Hughie lad?

HUGH (*looking about for Neli and speaking fretfully*)

Nay.

DEACON ROBERTS (*unwinding his muffler*)

Ye look as if ye had been in spiritual struggle.

HUGH (*drearily*)

I have.

DEACON ROBERTS

Well, indeed, Hughie, 't is neither the angel nor the archfiend here now, nor for me any struggle except the struggle to both live an' eat well — ho! ho! *an'* eat well, I say — in Bala. (*Laughs jovially*) Ho! ho! not bad, Hughie lad, —live *an'* eat in Bala!

HUGH (*patiently*)

With that muffler around your head, Deacon, ye are enough to frighten the devil out of Babylon.

DEACON ROBERTS (*unwinding last lap of muffler*)

Yiss, yiss, Hughie lad. But I dunno but ye will understand better if I call myself, let us say the angel with the sickle — ho! ho! — not the angel of fire, Hughie, but the angel with the sharp sickle gatherin' the clusters of the vines of the earth. (*Sudden change of subject*) Where is Neli?

HUGH (*vacantly*)

I dunno — yiss, yiss, at market.

DEACON ROBERTS (*chuckling*)

Dear, dear, at market — a fine day for marketing! An' my essays on the Flamin' Wickedness of Baby-

lon, Hughie lad, how are they? Have ye finished them?

HUGH

Nay, not yet.

DEACON ROBERTS (*looking over counter, touching one article after another as he mentions it*) Pickled herrin' — grand but wet! Pickles — dear me, yiss, Neli's — an' good! Butter from Hafod-y-Porth — sweet as honey! (*He picks up a pat of butter and sniffs it, drawing in his breath loudly. He smiles with delight and lays down the butter. He takes off his hat and dusts it out inside. He puts his hat back on his head, smiles, chuckles, picks up butter, taps it thoughtfully with two fingers, smells it and puts down the pat lingeringly. He lifts up a loaf of Neli Williams's bread, glancing from it to the butter*) Bread! Dear me! (*His eyes glance on to codfish*) American cod-fish, (*picks up package and smacks his lips loudly*) dear *anwyl*, with potatoes — (*reads*) "Gloucester." (*Reaches out and touches eggs affectionately*) Eggs — are they fresh, Hugh?

HUGH (*dreamily*)

I dunno. But I broke some of them. They might be!

[*Looks at floor.*

DEACON ROBERTS

Were they fresh?

HUGH

I dunno.

DEACON ROBERTS (*sharply*)

Dunno? About *eggs?*

[*Picks up egg.*

HUGH (*troubled*)

Neli's hens laid them.

DEACON ROBERTS

I see, Neli's hens laid 'em, an' you broke 'em! Admirable arrangement! (*Putting down the egg and turning towards the cheese, speaks on impatiently*) Well, indeed then, were the hens fresh?

HUGH (*more cheerful*)

Yiss, I think. Last week the basket was grand an' full of fresh eggs, but they disappeared, aye, they did indeed.

DEACON ROBERTS (*starts*)

Where did they go to?

HUGH (*injured*)

How can I say? I was here, an' I would have told her if I had seen, but I did not whatever. Neli reproves me for too great attention to visions an' too little to the groceries.

DEACON ROBERTS (*chuckling*)

Aye, Hughie lad, such is married life! Let a man marry his thoughts or a wife, for he cannot have both. I have chosen my thoughts.

HUGH

But the cat —

DEACON ROBERTS (*briskly*)

Aye, a man can keep a cat without risk.

HUGH

Nay, nay, I mean the cat took 'em. I dunno. That's it — (*Hugh clutches his head, trying to recall something*) Uch, that's it! Neli told me to remember to ask ye if ye thought eggs could steal a cat whatever.

DEACON ROBERTS (*puzzled*)

Eggs steal a cat?

HUGH (*troubled*)

Nay, nay, cats steal an egg?

DEACON ROBERTS (*startled and looking suspiciously at Hugh*)

Cats? What cats?

HUGH (*with solemnity*)

Aye, but I told Neli I'm no carin' about cats with heaven starin' me in the face. Deacon Roberts, those essays are grand an' wonderful.

DEACON ROBERTS (*relieved*)

Yiss, yiss! Hughie lad, theology is a means to salvation an' sometimes to other ends, too. But there's no money in theology. (*Sighs*) And a man must live! (*Points to corroded dish of pickled herring, sniffing greedily*) Dear people, what beautiful herrin'! (*Wipes moisture away from corners of his mouth and picks up a fish from dish, holding it, dripping, by tail*) Pickled?

HUGH (*looking at corroded dish*)

Tuppence.

DEACON ROBERTS (*shortly*)

Dear to-day.

HUGH (*eyeing dish dreamily*)

I dunno. Neli —

DEACON ROBERTS (*eyes glittering, cutting straight through sentence and pointing to cheese*)

Cheese?

HUGH

A shillin', I'm thinkin'.

DEACON ROBERTS

A shillin', Hugh? (*Deacon Roberts lifts knife and drops it lightly on edge of cheese. The leaf it pares off he picks up and thrusts into his mouth, greedily pushing in the crumbs. Then he pauses and looks slyly at Hugh*) Was it sixpence ye said, Hugh?

HUGH (*gazing towards the fire and the volume of essays*)

Yiss, sixpence, I think.

DEACON ROBERTS (*sarcastically*)

Still too dear, Hugh!

HUGH (*sighing*)

I dunno, it might be dear. (*With more animation*) Deacon, when Babylon fell —

DEACON ROBERTS (*wipes his mouth and, interrupting Hugh, speaks decisively*)

No cheese. (*He removes his tall Welsh beaver hat, mops off his bald white head, and, pointing up to the shelves, begins to dust out inside of hatband again but with a deliberate air of preparation*) What is that up there, Hughie lad?

HUGH (*trying to follow the direction of the big red wavering forefinger*)

Ye mean that? A B C In-fants' Food, I think.

DEACON ROBERTS (*giving his hat a final wipe*)

Nay, nay, not for me, Hughie lad! Come, come, brush the smoke of burnin' Babylon from your eyes! In a minute I must be goin' back to my study, whatever. An' I have need of food!

[*Hugh takes a chair and mounts it. The Deacon looks at Hugh's back, puts his hand down on the counter, and picks up an egg from the basket. He holds it to the light and squints through it to see whether it is fresh.*

Then he turns it lovingly over in his fat palm, makes a dexterous backward motion and slides it into his coat-tail pocket. This he follows with two more eggs for same coat tail and three for other — in all half a dozen.

HUGH (*dreamily pointing to tin*)

Is it Yankee corn?

DEACON ROBERTS (*to Hugh's back and slipping in second egg*)

Nay, nay, not that, Hughie lad, that tin above!

HUGH (*absent-mindedly touching tin*)

Is it ox tongue?

DEACON ROBERTS (*slipping in third egg and not even looking up*)

Ox tongue, lad? Nay, nothin' so large as that.

HUGH (*dreamingly reaching up higher*)

American condensed m-m-milk? Yiss, that's what it is.

DEACON ROBERTS (*slipping in fourth egg*)

Condensed milk, Hughie? Back to infants' food again.

HUGH (*stretching up almost to his full length and holding down tin with tips of long white finger*)

Kippert herrin'? Is it that?

DEACON ROBERTS (*slipping in fifth egg*)

Nay, nay, a little further up, if you please.

HUGH (*gasping, but still reaching up and reading*)

Uto — Uto — U-to-pi-an Tinned Sausage. Is it that?

DEACON ROBERTS (*slipping in sixth egg with an air of finality and triumph, and lifting his hat from the counter*)

Nay, nay, not that, Hughie lad. Why do ye not

begin by askin' me what I want? Ye've no gift for sellin' groceries whatever.

HUGH (*surprised*)

Did I not ask ye?

DEACON ROBERTS

Nay.

HUGH

What would Neli say whatever? She would never forgive me.

DEACON ROBERTS (*amiably*)

Well, I forgive ye, Hughie lad. 'Tis a relish, I'm needin'!

HUGH (*relieved*)

Well, indeed, a relish! We have relishes on that shelf above, I think. (*Reaches up but pauses helplessly*) I must tell Neli that these shelves are not straight. [*Dizzy and clinging to the shelves, his back to the Deacon.*

DEACON ROBERTS (*picking up a pound of butter wrapped in print paper*)

Is it up there?

HUGH

No, I think, an' the shelves are not fast whatever. I must tell Neli. They go up like wings. (*Trying to reach to a bottle just above him*) Was it English or American?

DEACON ROBERTS (*putting the pound of butter in his hat and his hat on his head*)

American, Hughie lad.

[*At that instant there is a noise from the inner kitchen, and Neli Williams opens the door. The Deacon turns,*

and their glances meet and cross. Each understands perfectly what the other has seen. Neli Williams has thrown off her red cloak and taken off her Welsh beaver hat. She is dressed in a short full skirt, white stockings, clogs on her feet, a striped apron, tight bodice, fichu, short sleeves, and white cap on dark hair.

NELI (*slowly*)

Uch! The Deacon has what he came for whatever!

HUGH (*turning to contradict his wife*)

Nay, Neli, — (*Losing his balance on chair, tumbles off, and, with arm flung out to save himself, strikes dish of pickled herring. The herring and brine fly in every direction, spraying the Deacon and Hughie; the bowl spins madly, dipping and revolving on the floor. For a few seconds nothing is audible except the bowl revolving on the flagstones and Hugh picking himself up and sneezing behind the counter*)

Achoo! Achoo! Dear me, Neli — Achoo!

NELI (*going quickly to husband and beginning to wipe brine from husband's forehead and cheeks; at the same time has her back to the Deacon and forming soundless letters with her lip, she jerks her head towards the Deacon*)

B–U–T–T–E–R!

HUGH (*drearily*)

Better? Aye, I'm better. It did not hurt me whatever.

NELI (*jerking head backwards towards Deacon Roberts and again forming letters with lips*)

B–U–T–T–E–R!

HUGH

What, water? Nay, I don't want any water.

DEACON ROBERTS (*coughing, ill at ease and glancing suspiciously at bowl that has come to rest near his leg*)
Ahem! 'T is cold here, Mrs. Williams, mum, an' I must be movin' on.

NELI (*savagely to Deacon*)
Stay where ye are whatever!

DEACON ROBERTS (*unaccustomed to being spoken to this way by a woman*)
Well, indeed, mum, I could stay, but I'm thinkin 't is cold an' — I'd better go.

NELI (*again savagely*)
Nay, stay! Stay for — for what ye came for whatever!
[*Neli looks challengingly at the Deacon. Then she goes on wiping brine carefully from husband's hair and from behind his ears. The Deacon coughs and pushes bowl away with the toe of his boot.*

DEACON ROBERTS (*smiling*)
'T is unnecessary to remain then, mum.

NELI (*to Hugh*)
What did he get?

HUGH (*sneezing*)
N — n — Achoo! — nothin'!

DEACON ROBERTS (*with sudden interest looking at the floor*)
Well, indeed!

NELI (*suspiciously*)
What is it?
[*He reaches down with difficulty to a small thick puddle on the floor just beneath his left coat tail. He aims a red forefinger at it, lifts himself, and sucks fingertip*)

DEACON ROBERTS (*smiling*)
Ahem, Mrs. Williams, mum, 't is excellent herrin'

brine! (*From the basket on the counter he picks up an egg which he tosses lightly and replaces in basket*) A beautiful fresh egg, Mrs. Williams, mum. I must be steppin' homewards.

HUGH (*struggling to speak just as Neli reaches his nose, wringing it vigorously as she wipes it*)

Aye, but, Neli, I was just tellin' ye when I fell that I could not find the Deacon's relish — uch, achoo! achoo!

DEACON ROBERTS (*with finality, tossing the egg in air, catching it and putting it back in basket*)

Well, indeed, mum, I must be steppin' homewards now.

[*Neli's glance rests on fire burning on other side of room. She puts down wet cloth. She turns squarely on the Deacon.*

NELI

What is your haste, Mr. Roberts? Please to go to the fire an' wait! I can find the relish.

DEACON ROBERTS (*hastily*)

Nay, nay, mum. I have no need any more — (*Coughs*) Excellent herrin' brine.

[*Goes towards door.*

NELI (*to Hugh*)

Take him to the fire, Hugh. 'T is a cold day whatever! (*Insinuatingly to Deacon*) Have ye a reason for wantin' to go, Mr. Roberts?

DEACON ROBERTS (*going*)

Nay, nay, mum, none at all! But, I must not trouble ye. 'T is too much to ask, an' I have no time to spare an' —

NELI (*interrupting and not without acerbity*)

Indeed, Mr. Roberts, sellin' what we *can* is our profit. (*To Hugh, who obediently takes Deacon by arm and pulls him towards fire*) Take him to the fire, lad. (*To Deacon*) What kind of a relish was it, did ye say, Mr. Roberts?

DEACON ROBERTS (*having a tug of war with Hugh*)

'T is an Indian relish, mum, but I cannot wait.

HUGH (*pulling harder*)

American, ye said.

DEACON ROBERTS (*hastily*)

Yiss, yiss, American Indian relish, that is.

NELI

Tut, 't is our specialty, these American Indian relishes! We have several. Sit down by the fire while I look them up. (*Wickedly*) As ye said, Mr. Roberts, 't is cold here this morning.

DEACON ROBERTS

There, Hughie lad, I must not trouble ye. (*Looks at clock*) 'T is ten minutes before twelve, an' my dinner will be ready at twelve.

[*Pulls harder.*

NELI (*to Hugh*)

Keep him by the fire, lad.

DEACON ROBERTS

There, Hughie lad, let me go!

[*But Hugh holds on, and the Deacon's coat begins to come off.*

NELI (*sarcastically*)

The relish — American Indian, ye said, I think, — will make your dinner taste fine and grand!

DEACON ROBERTS (*finding that without leaving his coat behind he is unable to go, he glowers at Hugh and speaks sweetly to Neli*)

'T is a beautiful clock, Mrs. Williams, mum. But I have n't five minutes to spare.

NELI (*keeping a sharp lookout on the rim of the Deacon's hat*)

Well, indeed, I can find the relish in just one minute. An' ye'll have abundance of time left.

DEACON ROBERTS (*trapped and gazing at clock with fine air of indifference*)

'T is a clever, shinin' lookin' clock whatever, Mrs. Williams, mum.

NELI

Have ye any recollection of the name of the maker of the relish, Mr. Roberts?

DEACON ROBERTS (*putting his hands behind him anxiously and parting his freighted coat tails with care; then, revolving, presenting his back and one large well-set bright-colored patch to the fire*)

Nay, I have forgotten it, Mrs. Williams, mum.

NELI

Too bad, but I'm sure to find it. (*She mounts upon chair. At this moment the shop doorbell rings violently, and there enters Mrs. Jones the Wash, very fat and very jolly. She is dressed in short skirt very full, clogs on her feet, a bodice made of striped Welsh flannel, a shabby kerchief, a cap on her head, and over this a shawl. Neli turns her head a little*)

Aye, Mrs. Jones the Wash, in a minute, if you please. Sit down until I find Deacon Roberts's relish whatever.

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*sits down on chair by door back center and folds her hands over her stomach*)
Yiss, yiss, mum, thank you. I've come for soap. I came once before, but no one was in.

NELI
Too bad!

MRS. JONES THE WASH
An' I looked in at the window an' saw nothin' but a skippin' shadow looked like a rat. Have ye any rats, Mrs. Williams, mum, do ye think?

NELI
Have I any rats? Well, indeed, 't is that I'm wantin' to know, Mrs. Jones the Wash!

MRS. JONES THE WASH
Well, I came back, for the water is eatin' the soap to-day as if 'twere sweets — aye, 't is a very meltin' day for soap!
[*Laughs.*

DEACON ROBERTS
'T is sweet to be clean, Mrs. Jones the Wash.

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*laughing*)
Yiss, yiss, Deacon Roberts, there has many a chapel been built out of a washtub, an' many a prayer risen up from the suds!

DEACON ROBERTS (*solemnly*)
Aye, Mrs. Jones the Wash, 't is holy work, washin' is very holy work.

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*touched*)
Yiss, yiss, I thank ye, Deacon Roberts.

DEACON ROBERTS
Well, I must be steppin' homeward now.

NELI (*firmly*)

Nay, Mr. Roberts, I am searchin' on the shelf where I think that American Indian relish is. Ye act as if ye had some cause to hurry, Mr. Roberts. Wait a moment, if you please.

DEACON ROBERTS

Well, indeed, but I am keepin' Mrs. Jones the Wash waitin'!

NELI (*to Mrs. Jones*)

Ye are in no haste?

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*thoroughly comfortable and happy*)

Nay, mum, no haste at all. I am havin' a rest, an' 't is grand an' warm here whatever.

NELI (*maliciously to Deacon*)

Does it feel hot by the fire?

DEACON ROBERTS (*experiencing novel sensations on the crown of his bald head*)

Mrs. Williams, mum, 't is hot in Y Gegin, but as with Llanycil Churchyard, Y Gegin is only the portal to a hotter an' a bigger place where scorchin' flames burn forever an' forever. Proverbs saith, 'Hell an' destruction are never full.' What, then, shall be the fate of women who have no wisdom, Mrs. Williams, mum?

NELI (*searching for relish*)

Aye, what? Well, indeed, the men must know.

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*nodding her head appreciatively at Hugh*)

Such eloquence, Mr. Williams! Aye, who in chapel has such grand theology as Deacon Roberts!

[*She sighs. The bell rings violently again, and Tom*

Morris the Sheep enters. He is dressed in gaiters, a shepherd's cloak, etc., etc. He carries a crook in his hand. He is a grizzle-haired, rosy-faced old man, raw-boned, strong and awkward, with a half-earnest, half-foolish look.

NELI (*looking around*)

Aye, Tom Morris the Sheep, come in an' sit down. I am lookin' out an American Indian relish for the Deacon.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP

Yiss, mum. I am wantin' to buy a little tobacco, mum. 'T is lonely upon the hillsides with the sheep, whatever.

DEACON ROBERTS (*hastily*)

I must go now, Mrs. Williams, mum, an' ye can wait on Tom Morris.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP

Nay, nay, Mr. Roberts, sir, there is no haste.

NELI (*to Tom Morris*)

Sit down there by the door, if you please.

[*Tom Morris seats himself on other side of door by back center.*

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP

Yiss, mum. (*Touches his forelock to Mrs. Jones the Wash*) A grand day for the clothes, Mrs. Jones, mum.

MRS. JONES THE WASH

Yiss, yiss, an' as I was just sayin' 't is a meltin' day for the soap!

NELI (*significantly*)

An' perhaps 't is a meltin' day for somethin' besides soap!

[*She looks at Deacon.*

HUGH (*earnestly*)

Yiss, yiss, for souls, meltin' for souls, I am hopin'. (*Picking up the book from the little three-legged table, and speaking to the Deacon*) They are enlargin' the burial ground in Llanycil Churchyard — achoo! achoo!

DEACON ROBERTS (*slyly moving a step away from fire*)

They're only enlargin' hell, Hughie lad, an' in that place they always make room for all.

[*He casts a stabbing look at Neli.*

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*nodding head*)

True, true, room for all! (*Chuckling*) But 't would be a grand place to dry the clothes in!

DEACON ROBERTS (*severely*)

Mrs. Jones, mum, hell is paved with words of lightness.

HUGH (*looking up from book, his face expressing delight*)

Deacon Roberts, I have searched for the place of hell, but one book sayeth one thing, an' another another. Where is hell?

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP

Aye, where is hell?

[*The bell rings violently. All start except Neli. Mrs. Jenkins the Midwife enters. She is an old woman, white-haired and with a commanding, somewhat disagreeable expression on her face. She wears a cloak and black Welsh beaver and walks with a stick.*

NELI

Yiss, yiss, Mrs. Jenkins the Midwife, I am just lookin' out a relish for the Deacon. Sit down by the fire, please.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE (*seating herself on other side of fire*)

Aye, mum, I've come for pins; I'm in no haste, mum.

NELI

Is it Jane Elin's baby?

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE

Aye, Jane Elin's, an' 't is my sixth hundredth birth.

HUGH

We're discussing the place of hell, Mrs. Jenkins, mum.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE

Well, indeed, I have seen the place of hell six hundred times then. (*Coughs and nods her head up and down over stick*) Heaven an' hell I'm thinkin' we have with us here.

HUGH

Nay, nay, how could that be? Tell us where is the place of hell, Deacon Roberts.

[*All listen with the most intense interest.*

DEACON ROBERTS (*nodding*)

Aye, the place of hell — (*stopping suddenly, a terrified look on his face, as the butter slides against the forward rim of his hat, almost knocking it off, then going on with neck rigid and head straight up*) to me is known where is that place — their way is dark an' slippery; they go down into the depths, an' their soul is melted because of trouble.

NELI (*pausing sceptically*)

Aye, 't is my idea of hell whatever with souls meltin', Mr. Roberts!

HUGH (*tense with expectation*)
Tell us where is that place!

DEACON ROBERTS (*neck rigid, head unmoved and voice querulous*)
Yiss, yiss. (*Putting his hand up and letting it down quickly*) Ahem! Ye believe that it rains in Bala?

HUGH (*eyes on Deacon in childlike faith*)
I do.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE
Yiss, yiss, before an' after every birth whatever!

MRS. JONES THE WASH
Yiss, yiss, who would know better than I that it rains in Bala?

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP
Aye, amen, it rains in Bala upon the hills an' in the valleys.

DEACON ROBERTS
Ye believe that it can rain in Bala both when the moon is full an' when 't is new?

HUGH (*earnestly*)
I do.

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*wearily*)
Yiss, any time.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP
Aye, all the time.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE
Yiss, yiss, it rains ever an' forever!

NELI (*forgetting the relish search*)
Well, indeed, 't is true it *can* rain in Bala at any time an' at all times.

DEACON ROBERTS (*paying no attention to Neli*)
Ye believe that Tomen-y-Bala is Ararat?

HUGH (*clutching his book more tightly and speaking in a whisper*)
Yiss.

MRS. JONES THE WASH
Aye, 't is true.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE
Yiss, the Hill of Bala is Ararat.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP
Yiss, I have driven the sheep over it whatever more than a hundred times.

NELI (*both hands on counter, leaning forward, listening to Deacon's words*)
Aye, Charles-y-Bala said so.

DEACON ROBERTS (*still ignoring Neli and lowering his coat tails carefully*)
Ye believe, good people, that the Druids called Noah "Tegid," an' that those who were saved were cast up on Tomen-y-Bala?

HUGH
Amen, I do!

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE (*nodding her old head*)
Aye, 't is true.

MRS. JONES THE WASH
Yiss, yiss.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP
Amen, 't is so.

DEACON ROBERTS (*moving a few steps away from the fire, standing sidewise, and lifting hand to head, checking it in midair*)
An' ye know that Bala has been a lake, an' Bala will become a lake?

HUGH
Amen, I do!

NELI (*assenting for the first time*)
Yiss, 't is true — that is.

MRS. JONES THE WASH
Dear *anwyl*, yiss!

DEACON ROBERTS (*with warning gesture towards window*)
Hell is out there — movin' beneath Bala Lake to meet all at their comin'. (*Raises his voice suddenly*) Red-hot Baal stones will fall upon your heads — Baal stones. Howl ye! (*Shouting loudly*) Meltin' stones smellin' of the bullocks. Howl, ye sinners! (*Clasping his hands together desperately*) Scorchin' hot — Oo — o — o — Howl ye! — howl ye!
(*The Deacon's hat sways, and he jams it down more tightly on his head. Unclasping his hands and as if stirring up the contents of a pudding dish*) 'Round an' round like this! Howl, ye sinners, howl!
[*All moan and sway to and fro except Neli.*

NELI (*sceptically*)
What is there to fear?

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE (*groaning*)
Nay, but what is there not to fear?

MRS. JONES THE WASH
Aye, outermost darkness. Och! Och!

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP
Have mercy!

DEACON ROBERTS (*shouting again*)
Get ready! Lift up your eyes! (*Welsh beaver almost falls off and is set straight in a twinkling*) Beg for

mercy before the stones of darkness burn thee, an' there is no water to cool thy tongue, an' a great gulf is fixed between thee an' those who might help thee!

NELI (*spellbound by the Deacon's eloquence and now oblivious to hat, etc.*)

Yiss, yiss, 't is true, 't is very true!

[*She steps down from chair and places hands on counter.*

DEACON ROBERTS (*his face convulsed, shouting directly at her*)

Sister, hast thou two eyes to be cast into hell fire?

NELI (*terrified and swept along by his eloquence*)

Two eyes to be burned?

[*All lower their heads, groaning and rocking to and fro.*

DEACON ROBERTS (*the butter trickling down his face, yelling with sudden violence*)

Hell is here an' now. Here in Bala, here in Y Gegin, here with us! Howl ye! Howl, ye sinners!

[*All moan together.*

HUGH (*whispering*)

Uch, here!

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE

Yiss, here!

MRS. JONES THE WASH

Yiss.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP (*terrified*)

Aye. Amen! Yiss!

NELI (*whispering*)
Here in Y Gegin!

DEACON ROBERTS (*clapping his hands to his face*)
Stones of Baal, stones of darkness, slimy with ooze, red-hot ooze, thick vapors! Howl ye, howl, ye sinners!
(*All moan and groan. Takes a glance at clock, passes hand over face and runs on madly, neck rigid, eyes staring, fat red cheeks turning to purple*)
Midday, not midnight, is the hour of hell; its sun never sets! But who knows when comes that hour of Hell?

NELI (*taking hands from counter and crossing them as she whispers*)
Who knows?

ALL (*groaning*)
Who knows?

HUGH (*voice quavering and lifting his Welsh essays*)
Who knows?

DEACON ROBERTS (*big yellow drops pouring down his face, his voice full of anguish*)
I will tell ye when is the hour of Hell. (*He points to the clock*) Is one the hour of Hell? Nay. Two? Nay. Three? No, not three. Four? Four might be the hour of Hell, but 't is not. Five? Nor five, indeed. Six? Nay. Seven? Is seven the hour, the awful hour? Nay, not yet. Eight? Is eight the hour — an hour bright as this bright hour? Nay, eight is not. (*The Deacon shouts in a mighty voice and points with a red finger at the clock*) 'T is comin'! 'T is comin', I say! Howl ye, howl! Only one min-

ute more! Sinners, sinners, lift up your eyes! Cry for mercy! (*All groan*) Cry for mercy! When the clock strikes twelve, 't will be the hour of Hell! Fix your eyes upon the clock! Watch! Count! Listen! 'T is strikin'. The stroke! The hour is here!

[*All dropped on their knees and turned towards the clock, their backs to the street door, are awaiting the awful stroke. The book has fallen from Hugh's hands. Neli's hands are clenched. Mrs. Jenkins the Midwife is nodding her old head. Mrs. Jones the Wash, on her knees, her face upturned to the clock, is rubbing up and down her thighs as if at the business of washing. Tom Morris the Sheep is prostrate and making a strange buzzing sound between his lips. The wheels of the clever old timepiece whir and turn. Then in the silent noonday the harsh striking begins: One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Nine, Ten, Eleven, Twelve.*

DEACON ROBERTS (*yelling suddenly in a loud and terrible voice*)

Hell let loose! Howl ye! Howl, ye sinners! (*All cover their eyes. All groan or moan. The clock ticks, the flame in the grate flutters, Neli's bosom rises and falls heavily*) Lest worse happen to ye, sin no more!

[*The Deacon looks at them all quietly. Then he lifts his hands in sign of blessing, smiles and vanishes silently through street door. All remain stationary in their terror. Nothing happens. But at last Neli fearfully, still spellbound by the Deacon's eloquence, lifts her eyes to the clock. Then cautiously she turns a little towards the fire and the place of Deacon Roberts.*

NELI

Uch! (*She stands on her feet and cries out*) The Deacon is gone!

HUGH (*raising his eyes*)

Uch, what is it? Babylon —

NELI

Babylon nothing!

[*She wrings her hands.*

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE (*groaning*)

Is he dead? Is he dead?

NELI (*with sudden plunge towards the door*)

Uch, ye old hypocrite, ye villain! Uch, my butter an' my eggs, my butter an' my eggs!

[*Neli throws open the door and slams it to after her as she pursues the Deacon out into the bright midday sunshine.*

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE

Well, indeed, what is it? Has she been taken?

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*getting up heavily*)

Such movin' eloquence! A saintly man is Deacon Roberts!

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP

Aye, a saintly man is Deacon Roberts!

HUGH (*picking up his book and speaking slowly*)

Aye, eloquence that knoweth the place of Hell even better than it knoweth Bala whatever!

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE (*very businesslike*)

Aye, 't was a treat — a rare treat! But where's my pins now?

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*very businesslike*)

Yiss, yiss, 't was a grand an' fine treat. But I'm wantin' my soap now.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP

Have ye any tobacco, Hughie lad?

CURTAIN

WELSH HONEYMOON

CHARACTERS

Vavasour Jones
Catherine Jones, his wife
Eilir Morris, nephew of Vavasour Jones
Mrs. Morgan, the baker
Howell Howell, the milliner

All applications for a license to perform this play in Great Britain must be addressed to Messrs. Samuel French, Limited, 26 Southampton Street, Strand, W.C. 2, London. No representation may be given unless a license has been obtained.

WELSH HONEYMOON

PLACE: *Beddgelert, a little village in North Wales.*

A Welsh kitchen. At back, in center, a deep ingle, with two hobs and fire bars fixed between, on either side settles. On the left hand side near the fire a churn; on the right, in a pile, some peat ready for use. Above the fireplace is a mantel on which are set some brass candlesticks, a deep copper cheese bowl, and two pewter plates. Near the left settle is a three-legged table set with teapot, cups and saucers for two, a plate of bread and butter, a plate of jam, and a creamer. At the right and to the right of the door, is a tall, highly polished, oaken grandfather's clock, with a shining brass face; to the left of the door is a tridarn. The tridarn dresser is lined with bright blue paper and filled with luster china. The floor is of beaten clay, whitewashed around the edges; from the rafters of the peaked ceiling hang flitches of bacon, hams, and bunches of onions and herbs. On the hearth is a copper kettle singing gaily; and on either side of the fireplace are latticed windows opening into the kitchen. Through the door to the right, when open, may be seen the flagstones and cottages of a Welsh village street; through latticed windows the twinkling of many village lights.

It is about half after eleven on Allhallows Eve in the village of Beddgelert.

At rise of curtain, the windows of kitchen are closed; the fire is burning brightly, and two candles are lighted on the mantelpiece. Vavasour Jones, about thirty-five

years old, dressed in a striped vest, a short, heavy blue coat, cut away in front, and with swallowtails behind, and trimmed with brass buttons, and somewhat tight trousers down to his boot tops, is standing by the open door at the right, looking out anxiously onto the glittering, rain-wet flagstone street and calling after some one.

VAVASOUR[1] (*calling*)

Kats, Kats, mind ye come home soon from Pally Hughes's!

CATHERINE (*from a distance*)

Aye, I'm no wantin' to go, but I must. Good-by!

VAVASOUR

Good-by! Kats, ye mind about comin' home? (*There is no reply, and Vavasour looks still further into the rain-wet street. He calls loudly and desperately*) Kats, Kats darlin', I cannot let you go without tellin' ye that — Kats, do ye hear?

[*There is still no reply and after one more searching of the street, Vavasour closes the door and sits down on the end of the nearest settle.*

VAVASOUR

Dear, dear, she's gone, an' I may never see her again, an' I'm to blame, an' she didn't know whatever that in the night — (*Loud knocking on the closed door; Vavasour jumps and stands irresolute*) The devil, it can't be comin' for her already?

[*The knocking grows louder.*

VOICE (*calling*)

Catherine, Vavasour, are ye in?

[1] The a's are broad throughout, i. e. Kats is pronounced Kaats; Vavasour is Vavasoor: ou is oo.

VAVASOUR (*opening the door*)

Aye, come in, whoever ye are.

[*Mrs. Morgan the Baker, dressed in a scarlet whittle and freshly starched white cap beneath her tall Welsh beaver hat, enters, shaking the rain from her cloak.*

MRS. MORGAN

Where's Catherine?

VAVASOUR

She's gone, Mrs. Morgan.

MRS. MORGAN

Gone? Are ye no goin'? Not goin' to Pally Hughes's on Allhallows' Eve?

VAVASOUR (*shaking his head and looking very white*)

Nay, I'm no feelin' well.

MRS. MORGAN

Aye, I see ye're ill?

VAVASOUR

Well, I'm not ill, but I'm not well. Not well at all, Mrs. Morgan.

MRS. MORGAN

We'll miss ye, but I must hurryin' on whatever; I'm late now. Good night!

VAVASOUR (*speaking drearily*) Good night! (*He closes the door and returns to the settle, where he sits down by the pile of peat and drops his head in his hand. Then he starts up nervously for no apparent cause and opens one of the lattice windows. With an exclamation of fear, he slams it to and throws his weight against the door. Calling and holding hard to the door*) Ye've no cause to come here! Ye old death's head, get away!

[*Outside there is loud pounding on the door and a voice*

shouting for admittance. Vavasour is obliged to fall back as the door is gradually forced open, and a head is thrust in, a white handkerchief tied over it.

HOWELL HOWELL (*seeing the terror-stricken face of Vavasour*)

Well, man, what ails ye; did ye think I was a ghost? (*Howell Howell the Milliner, in highlows and a plum-colored coat, a handkerchief on his hat, enters, stamping off the rain and closing the door. He carefully wipes off his plum-colored sleeves and speaks indignantly*) Well, man, are ye crazy, keepin' me out in the rain that way? Where's Catherine?

VAVASOUR (*stammering*)

She's at P-p-p-ally Hughes's.

HOWELL HOWELL

Are ye no goin'?

VAVASOUR

Nay, Howell Howell, I'm no goin'.

HOWELL HOWELL

An' dressed in your best? What's the matter? Have ye been drinkin' whatever?

VAVASOUR (*wrathfully*)

Drinkin'! I'd better be drinkin' when neighbors go walkin' round the village on Allhallow's Eve with their heads done up in white.

HOWELL HOWELL

Aye, well, I can't be spoilin' the new hat I have, that I cannot. A finer beaver there has never been in my shop.

[*He takes off the handkerchief, hangs it where the heat of the fire will dry it a bit, and then, removing the beaver, shows it to Vavasour, turning it this way and that.*

VAVASOUR (*absent-mindedly*)
Aye, grand, grand, man!

HOWELL HOWELL
What are ye gazin' at the clock for?

VAVASOUR (*guiltily*)
I'm no lookin' at anything.

HOWELL HOWELL
Well, indeed, I must be goin', or I shall be late at Pally Hughes's. Good night.

VAVASOUR
Good night.
(*He closes the door and stands before the clock, studying it. While he is studying its face the door opens slowly, and the tumbled, curly head of a lad about eighteen years of age peers in. The door continues slowly to open. Vavasour unconscious all the while*)
'Tis ten now. Ten, eleven, twelve; that's three hours left, 'tis; nay, nay, 'tis only two hours left, after all, an' then —

EILIR MORRIS (*bounding in and shutting the door behind him with a bang*)
Boo! Whoo — o — o!

VAVASOUR (*his face blanched, dropping limply on to the settle*)
The devil!

EILIR MORRIS (*troubled*)
Uch, the pity, Uncle! I didn't think, an' ye're ill!

VAVASOUR
Tut, tut, 'tis no matter, an' I'm not ill — not ill at all, but Eilir, lad, ye're kin, an' — could ye promise never to tell?

EILIR MORRIS (*who thinks his uncle has been drinking, speaks to him as if he would humor his whim*)
Aye, Uncle, I'm kin, an' I promise. Tell on. What is it? Are ye sick?

VAVASOUR (*drearily*)
Uch, lad, I'm not sick!

EILIR MORRIS
Well, what ails ye?

VAVASOUR
'Tis Allhallow's Eve an' —

EILIR MORRIS
Aren't ye goin' to Pally Hughes's?

VAVASOUR (*moaning and rising*)
Ow, the devil, goin' to Pally Hughes's while 'tis drawin' nearer an' nearer an' — Ow! 'Tis the night when Catherine must go.

EILIR MORRIS
When Aunt Kats must go! What do you mean?

VAVASOUR
She'll be dead to-night at twelve.

EILIR MORRIS (*bewildered*)
Dead at twelve? But she's at Pally Hughes's. Does she know it?

VAVASOUR
No, but I do, an' to think I've been unkind to her! I've tried this year to make up for it, but 'tis no use, lad; one year'll never make up for ten of harsh words, whatever. Ow!

[*Groaning, Vavasour collapses on to the settle and rocks to and fro, moaning aloud.*

EILIR MORRIS (*mystified*)

Well, ye've not been good to her, Uncle, that's certain; but ye've been different the past year.

VAVASOUR (*sobbing*)

Aye, but a year'll not do any good, an' she'll be dyin' at twelve to-night. Ow! I've turned to the scriptures to see what it says abous a man an' his wife, but it'll no do, no do, no do!

EILIR MORRIS

Have ye been drinkin', Uncle?

VAVASOUR (*hotly*)

Drinkin'!

EILIR MORRIS

Well, indeed, no harm, but, Uncle, I cannot understand why Aunt Kats's goin' an' where.

VAVASOUR (*rising suddenly from the settle and seizing Eilir by the coat lapel*)

She's goin' to leave me, lad; 'tis Allhallow's Eve whatever! An' she'll be dyin' at twelve. Aye, a year ago things were so bad between us, on Allhallow's Eve I went down to the church porch shortly before midnight to see whether the spirit of your Aunt Kats would be called an' —

EILIR MORRIS

Uncle, 'twas fair killin' her!

VAVASOUR

I wanted to see whether she would live the twelve months out. An' as I was leanin' against the church wall, hopin', aye, lad, prayin' to see her spirit there, an' know she'd die, I saw somethin' comin' 'round the corner with white over its head.

EILIR MORRIS (*wailing*)

Ow—w!

VAVASOUR

It drew nearer an' nearer, an' when it came in full view of the church porch, it paused, it whirled around like that, an' sped away with the shroud flappin' about its feet, an' the rain beatin' down on its white hood.

EILIR MORRIS (*wailing again*)

Ow — w!

VAVASOUR

But there was time to see that it was the spirit of Catherine, an' I was glad because my wicked prayer had been answered, an' because with Catherine dyin' the next Allhallow's, we'd have to live together only the year out.

EILIR MORRIS (*raising his hand*)

Hush, what's that?

VARASOUR

'Tis voices whatever.

[*Both listen, Eilir goes to the window, Vavasour to the door. The voices become louder.*

EILIR MORRIS

They're singin' a song at Pally Hughes's.

(*Voices are audibly singing*)

Ni awn adre bawb dan ganu,
Ar hyd y nos;
Saif ein hiaith safo Cymru,
Ar hyd y nos;
Bydded undeb a brawdgarwch
Ini'n gwlwm diogelwch,

Felly canwn er hyfrydwch,
Ar hyd y nos.

Sweetly sang beside a fountain,
All through the night,
Mona's maiden on that mountain,
All through the night.
When wilt thou, from war returning,
In whose breast true love is burning,
Come and change to joy my mourning,
By day and night?

VAVASOUR

Aye, they're happy, an' Kats does not know. I went home that night, lad, thinkin' 'twas the last year we'd have to live together, an', considerin' as 'twas the last year, I might just as well try to be decent an' kind. An' when I reached home, Catherine was up waitin' for me an' spoke so pleasantly, an' we sat down an' had a long talk — just like the days when we were courtin'.

EILIR MORRIS

Did she know, Uncle?

VAVASOUR (*puzzled*)

Nay, how could she know. But she seems queer, — as if she felt the evil comin'. Well, indeed, each day was sweeter than the one before, an' we were man an' wife in love an' kindness at last, but all the while I was thinkin' of that figure by the churchyard. Lad, lad, ye'll be marryin' before long, — be good to her, lad, be good to her!

[*Vavasour lets go the lapels of Eilir's coat and sinks*

back on to the settle, half sobbing. Outside the roar of wind and rain growing louder can be heard.

VAVASOUR (*looking at the clock*)

An' here 'tis Allhallow's Eve again, an' the best year of my life is past, an' she must die in an hour an' a half. Ow, ow! It has all come from my own evil heart an' evil wish. Think, lad, prayin' for her callin'; aye, goin' there, hopin' ye'd see her spirit, an' countin' on her death!

EILIR MORRIS (*mournfully*)

Aye, Uncle, 'tis bad, an' I've no word to say to ye for comfort. I recollect well the story Granny used to tell about Christmas Pryce; 'twas somethin' the same whatever. An' there was Betty Williams was called a year ago, an' is dead now; an' there was Silvan Griffith, an' Geffery, his friend, an' Silvan had just time to dig Geffery's grave an' then his own, too, by its side, an' they was buried the same day an' hour.

VAVASOUR (*wailing*)

Ow — w — w!

[*At that moment the door is blown violently open by the wind; both men jump and stare out into the dark where only the dimmed lights of the rain-swept street are to be seen, and the very bright windows of Pally Hughes's cottage.*

EILIR MORRIS

Uch, she'll be taken there!

VAVASOUR

Aye, an', Eilir, she was loath to go to Pally's, but I could not tell her the truth.

EILIR MORRIS

Are ye not goin', Uncle?

VAVASOUR

Nay, lad, I cannot go. I'm fair crazy. I'll just be stayin' home, waitin' for them to bring her back. Ow — w — w!

EILIR MORRIS

Tut, tut, Uncle, I'm sorry. I'll just see for ye what they're doin'.

[*Eilir steps out and is gone for an instant. He comes back excitedly.*

VAVASOUR (*shouting after him*)

Can ye see her, lad?

EILIR MORRIS (*returning*)

Dear, they've a grand display, raisins an' buns, an' spices an' biscuits —

VAVASOUR

But your Aunt Kats?

EILIR MORRIS

Aye, an' a grand fire, an' a tub with apples in it an' —

VAVASOUR

But Catherine?

EILIR MORRIS

Aye, she was there near the fire, an' just as I turned, they blew the lights out.

VAVASOUR

Blew the lights out! Uch, she'll be taken there whatever!

EILIR MORRIS

They're tellin' stories in the dark.

VAVASOUR

Go back again an' tell what ye can see of your Aunt Kats, lad.

EILIR MORRIS

Aye.

VAVASOUR (*shouting after him*)

Find where she's sittin', lad — make certain of that.

EILIR MORRIS (*running in breathless*)

They're throwin' nuts on the fire —

VAVASOUR

Is she there?

EILIR MORRIS

I'm thinkin' she is, but old Pally Hughes was just throwin' a nut on the fire an' —

VAVASOUR (*impatiently*)

'Tis no matter about Pally Hughes whatever, but your Aunt Kats, did —

EILIR MORRIS

There was only the light of the fire; I did not see her, but I'll go again.

VAVASOUR

Watch for her nut an' see does it burn brightly.

EILIR MORRIS (*going out*)

Aye.

VAVASOUR (*calling after*)

Mind, I'm wantin' to know what she's doin'.

[*He has scarcely spoken the last word when a great commotion is heard: a door across the street being slammed to violently, and the sound of running feet. Vavasour straightens up, his eyes in terror on the door, which Catherine Jones throws open and bursts through.*

VAVASOUR (*holding out his arms*)

Catherine, is it really ye!

[*Catherine, after a searching glance at him, draws herself up. Vavasour draws himself up, too, and then stoops to pick up some peat which he puts on the fire, and crosses over to left and sits down on the settle near the chimney, without having embraced her. Catherine's face is flushed, her eyes wild under the pretty white cap she wears, a black Welsh beaver above it. She is dressed in a scarlet cloak, under this a tight bodice and short, full skirt, bright stockings, and clogs with brass tips. Her apron is of heavy linen, striped; over her breast a kerchief is crossed, and from the elbows down to the wrist are full white sleeves stiffly starched.*

CATHERINE

Yiss, yiss, 'twas dull at Pally's — very dull. My nut didn't burn very brightly, an' — an' — well, indeed, my feet was wet, an' I feared takin' a cold.

VAVASOUR

Yiss, yiss, 'tis better for ye here, dearie.

[*Then there is silence between them. Catherine still breathes heavily from the running, and Vavasour shuffles his feet. While they are both sitting there, unable to say a word, the door opens without a sound, and Eilir's curly head is thrust in. A guttural exclamation from him makes them start and look towards the door, but he closes it before they can see him. Catherine then takes off her beaver and looks at Vavasour. Vavasour opens his mouth, shuts it, and opens it again.*

VAVASOUR (*desperately*)

Did ye have a fine time at Pally's?

CATHERINE

Aye, 'twas gay an' fine an' — an' — yiss, yiss, so 'twas an' so 'twasn't.

VAVASOUR (*his eyes seeking the clock*)

A quarter past eleven, uch! Katy, do ye recall Pastor Evan's sermon, the one he preached last New Year?

CATHERINE (*also glancing at the clock*)

Sixteen minutes after eleven — yiss — yiss —

VAVASOUR (*catching Catherine's glance at the clock*)

Well, Catherine, do —

CATHERINE

Yiss, yiss, I said I did whatever. 'Twas about inheritin' the grace of life together.

VAVASOUR

Kats, dear, wasn't he sayin' that love is eternal, an' that — a man — an' — an' — his wife was lovin' for — for —

CATHERINE (*glancing at the clock and meeting Vavasour's eyes just glancing away from the clock*)

Aye, lad, for everlastin' life! Uch, what have I done?

VAVASOUR (*unheeding and doubling up as if from pain*)

Half after eleven! Yiss, yiss, dear, didn't he say that the Lord was mindful of us — of our difficulties, an' our temptations an' our mistakes?

CATHERINE (*tragically*)

Aye, an' our mistakes. Ow, ow, ow, but a half hour's left!

VAVASOUR

Do ye think, dearie, that if a man were to — to —

uch! — be unkind to his wife — an' was sorry an' his wife — his wife dies, that he'd be — be —

CATHERINE (*tenderly*)

Aye, I'm thinkin' so. An', lad dear, do ye think if anythin' was to happen to ye to-night, — yiss, *this* night, — that ye'd take any grudge against me away with ye?

VAVASOUR (*stiffening*)

Happen to *me*, Catherine?

[*Vavasour collapses, groaning. Catherine goes to his side on the settle.*

CATHERINE (*in an agonized voice*)

Uch, dearie, what is it, what is it, what ails ye?

VAVASOUR (*slanting an eye at the clock*)

Nothin', nothin' at all. Ow, the devil, 'tis twenty minutes before twelve whatever!

CATHERINE

Lad, lad, what is it?

VAVASOUR

'Tis nothin', nothin' at all — 'tis — ow! — 'tis just a little pain across me.

CATHERINE (*her face whitening as she steals a look at the clock and puts her arm around Vavasour*)

Vavasour, lad dear, is that the wind in the chimney? Put your arm about me an' hold fast.

VAVASOUR (*both hands across his stomach, his eyes on the clock*)

Ow — ten minutes!

CATHERINE (*shaking all over*)

Is that a step at the door?

VAVASOUR (*unheeding*)

'Tis goin' to strike now in a minute.

CATHERINE (*her eyes in horror on the clock*)

Five minutes before twelve!

VAVASOUR (*almost crying, his eyes fixed on the clock's face*)

Uch, the toad, the serpent!

CATHERINE (*her face in her hands*)

Dear God, he's goin' now!

VAVASOUR (*covering his eyes*)

Uch, the devil! Uch, the gates of hell!

[*Catherine cries out, Vavasour groans loudly. The clock is striking: One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Nine, Ten, Eleven, Twelve! The last loud clang vibrates and subsides. Through a chink in her fingers Catherine is peering at Vavasour. Through a similar chink his agonized eyes are peering at her.*

CATHERINE (*gulping*)

Uch!

VAVASOUR

The devil!

CATHERINE (*putting out her hand to touch him*)

Lad, dear!

[*They embrace, they kiss, they dance madly about. Then they do it all over again. While they are doing this, Eilir opens the door again and thrusts in his head. He stares open-eyed, open-mouthed at them, and leans around the side of the door to see what time it is, saying audibly "five minutes past twelve," grunts his satisfaction, and closes the door.*

VAVASOUR (*mad with joy*)

Kats, are ye here, really here?

CATHERINE (*surprised*)

Am *I* here? Tut, lad, are *ye* here?

VAVASOUR (*shrewdly*)

Yiss, that is are we *both* here?

CATHERINE (*perplexed*)

Did ye think I wasn't goin' to be?

VAVASOUR (*suppressed intelligent joy in his eyes*)

No — o, not that, only I thought, I thought ye was goin' to — to — to faint, Kats. I thought ye looked like it, Kats.

CATHERINE (*the happiness on her face vanishing, sinks on to the nearest settle*)

Uch, I'm a bad, bad woman, aye, Vavasour Jones, a *bad* woman!

VAVASOUR (*puzzled, yet lightly*)

Nay, Kats, nay!

CATHERINE (*desperately and almost in tears*)

Ye cannot believe what I must tell ye. Lad, a year ago this night I went to the church porch, hopin', aye, prayin', ye'd be called, that I'd see your spirit walkin'.

VAVASOUR (*starting and recovering himself*)

Catherine, ye did that!

CATHERINE (*plunging on with her confession*)

Aye, lad, I did, I'd been so unhappy with the quarrelin' an' hard words. I could think of nothin' but gettin' rid of them.

VAVASOUR (*in a tone of condemnation and standing over her*)

That was bad, very bad indeed!

CATHERINE

An' then, lad, when I reached the church corner an' saw your spirit was really there, *really* called, an' I knew ye'd not live the year out, I was frightened, but uch! lad, I was glad, I was indeed.

VAVASOUR (*looking grave*)

Catherine, 'twas a terrible thing to do!

CATHERINE (*meekly*)

Yiss, I know it now, but I didn't then. I was hard-hearted, an' I was weak with longin' to escape from it all. An' when I ran home I was frightened, but uch! lad, I was glad, too, an' now it hurts me so to think of it. Can you no comfort me?

VAVASOUR (*grudgingly, but not touching Catherine's outstretched hand*)

Aye, well, I could, but Kats, 'twas such a terrible thing to do!

CATHERINE

Yiss, yiss, ye'll never be able to forgive me, I'm thinkin'. An' then when ye came in from the lodge, ye spoke so pleasantly to me that I was troubled. An' now the year through it has grown better an' better, an' I could think of nothin' but lovin' ye, an' wishin' ye to live, an' knowin' I was the cause of your bein' called. Uch, lad, *can* ye forgive me?

VAVASOUR (*slowly*)

Aye, I can, none of us is without sin; but, Catherine, it was wrong, aye, aye, 'twas a wicked thing for a woman to do.

CATHERINE (*still more meekly*)

An' then to-night, lad, I was expectin' ye to go, knowin' ye couldn't live after twelve, an' ye sittin' there so innocent an' mournful. An' when the time came, I wanted to die myself. Uch!

VAVASOUR (*sitting down beside her and putting an arm about her as he speaks in a superior tone of voice*)

No matter, dearie, now. It *was* wrong in ye, but

we're still here, an' it's been a sweet year, yiss, better nor a honeymoon, an' all the years after we'll make better nor this. There, there, Kats, let's have a bit of a wassail to celebrate our Allhallow's honeymoon, shall we?

CATHERINE (*starting to fetch a bowl*)

Yiss, lad, 'twould be fine, but Vavasour, can ye forgive me, think, lad, for hopin', aye, an' prayin' to see your spirit called, just wishin' that ye'd not live the year out?

VAVASOUR (*with condescension*)

Kats, I can, an' I'm not layin' it up against ye, though 'twas a wicked thing for ye to do — for any one to do. Now, darlin', fetch the bowl.

CATHERINE (*starting for the bowl again but turning on him*)

Vavasour, how does it happen that the callin' is set aside, an' that ye're really here? Such a thing has not been in Beddgelert in the memory of man.

VAVASOUR (*with dignity*)

I'm not sayin' how it's happened, Kats, but I'm thinkin' 'tis modern times whatever, an' things have changed — aye, indeed, 'tis modern times.

CATHERINE (*sighing contentedly*)

Good! 'Tis lucky 'tis modern times whatever!

CURTAIN

A TRESS OF HAIR

CHARACTERS

Pedr Evans.
Mrs. Evans, his mother.
Neli Parry.
Catrin Vaughan.

A TRESS OF HAIR

PLACE: *Conway, North Wales.*

It may be a trick of the evening light due to the low casement windows of the living room, but the room seems more peaceful than most rooms. The subdued light touches soft green walls gently, reaching for the top of the walls where, in a border of quaint paper runs a shining river, repeating itself in and out among alleys of green trees. There is one small table at the side of the entrance door at the back, and on either side of the door low casement windows. On both windows may be read upside down the word PHOTOGRAPHS. Below the river border, here and there hang photographs much enlarged and of a very unusual sort: one of gulls just rising from the sands; another of a great druidical stone; a third of a beautiful young woman, holding a lamb in her arms, behind her the reaches of a barren mountainside; a fourth of an old woman seated at the window reading a letter; etc. Beside the door that leads out into the kitchen is an old grandfather clock. On the other side of the room is a Welsh tridarn (dresser).

Catrin Vaughan *comes in. She looks about. Her eyes are sharp, hard blue eyes, her hair an astounding coiffure of yellow puffs, the hat on it pink, her face thick with chalk, her lips a glossy carmine, her*

throat embedded in fluffs of cheap tulle, her figure stuffed into an ancient suit of white serge.

CATRIN (*calling*)

Mrs. Evans!

MRS. EVANS (*coming to the door and no further*)

[*Her skirt is a little full and a little short; her bodice is tight; there is a white kerchief about her shoulders; and her white hair has a small cap on it. Mrs. Evans is about seventy years old, short, plump, comely.*

Aye, so that's you, Catrin Vaughan, again!

CATRIN

Is Pedr here?

MRS. EVANS

He is not.

[*She makes no move to invite the girl in.*

CATRIN

Has he gone to Liverpool?

MRS. EVANS

Nay.

CATRIN

Has he gone to London whatever?

MRS. EVANS

He has not.

CATRIN (*patting the puffs of yellow hair*)

I had these from London. 'Tis the fashion whatever!

MRS. EVANS

Is it indeed!

CATRIN (*with sly malice*)

Mrs. Evans, mum, do ye believe what the Bible says about a woman's hair bein' her glory?

MRS. EVANS (*off her guard*)
Aye, so I do.

CATRIN
A man has the right to expect certain things of a woman, includin' her hair, now hasn't he?

MRS. EVANS (*studying Catrin's face*)
Yiss, but I believe the story of Samson an' Delilah too whatever!

CATRIN
Yiss, Mrs. Evans, so do I. But that does not make me go against Scripture, an' like short-haired women.

MRS. EVANS
Tut, tut, who said that I did? Better a thousand times than that scrambled egg on your head am I likin' Neli Parry's long glossy hair.
[*Catrin bursts into shrill silly laughter.*

CATRIN
Dear me, dear me, to think of comparin' the latest style of hair dressin' with scrambled eggs whatever! (*Stops laughing*) But hair was somethin' I was comin' to talk with Pedr about.

MRS. EVANS
He's no here, an' talkin' can wait!

CATRIN
Yiss, an' about a book called *Lady Nain's Escape*,—a beautiful romance, an' it has Piccadilly in it an' busses whatever an' fine ladies in their carriages with their cloaks an' furs an' furbelows about their necks. (*She touches the tulle on her neck*) Somethin' like this.

MRS. EVANS
Dear me!

CATRIN
Aye, an' the romance cost a s'illin', it did.

MRS. EVANS (*still scornfully*)
Well indeed!

CATRIN
Yiss, I'm thinkin' Pedr will have seen all these fine things in London, for Pedr has been to London, an' he will know.

MRS. EVANS
He might.

CATRIN (*with bold malice*)
I am dependin' on him, I am, to understand what old men an' old women in Conway have never even seen.

MRS. EVANS
There is much they have not seen, an' much the decent ones would be loath to see.

CATRIN (*saucily*)
Dear me, mum, ye don't say!

MRS. EVANS
I do.

[*At that instant there are screams of laughter and the sound of many running feet and voices calling to one another.*

Dear, dear, is it a fire?

CATRIN
Nay, of laughter there is little at a fire. But 'tis somethin' they are racin' to see whatever.

MRS. EVANS
Somethin' they're racin' to see?

CATRIN

Yiss, somethin' of interest to Pedr.

MRS. EVANS (*advancing*)

What is it?

CATRIN

Somethin' Neli Parry herself hung out the window for Pedr to see!

MRS. EVANS

Somethin' for Pedr to see?

CATRIN

Yiss, somethin' the old men an' old women of Conway have never seen hangin' out a window whatever!

MRS. EVANS

What is it?

CATRIN

Somethin' the decent ones would be loath to see! [*Shouts of laughter echo up and down the old street.*

MRS. EVANS

Catrin Vaughan, at what are they laughin'?

CATRIN

At Neli Parry's *cocyn.*

MRS. EVANS

At Neli's *cocyn?*

CATRIN

Yiss, her tress of hair. 'Tis hung out.

MRS. EVANS

I am no believin' it.

CATRIN

Aye, well, mum, she hung it out.

MRS. EVANS

Neli, do a thing like that? Never!

CATRIN

Aye, well, 'tis hangin' there for Pedr to see!

MRS. EVANS

She has no *cocyn.* An' all her hair is her own whatever.

CATRIN

Is it!

MRS. EVANS

Neli Parry would no do an immodest thing like that.

CATRIN

Well, indeed, this minute her hair is hangin' out of the window whatever, an' blowin' like a bunch of dark leaves in a high wind, — all her smooth, glossy hair, mum, in one separate tress.

[*Laughs.*

MRS. EVANS

I am no believin' it! If it hangs there, 'twas you who did it.

CATRIN

I, Mrs. Evans, mum, how could I get the very hair — *cocyn* or not — off Neli's head? But, if ye wish, I'll be fetchin' it back in a paper poke, mum, for ye to see.

MRS. EVANS

Ye are no to return.

CATRIN

But, Mrs. Evans, mum, 'tis somethin' she's wantin' Pedr to see. She's no been to work today.

MRS. EVANS

Ye are no to return here ever again, Catrin Vaughan!

CATRIN

I know a boy will gladly climb up to get the tress of hair for me.

MRS. EVANS

Ye are to send no one to touch it!

CATRIN

Aye, but maybe her dad would like that to sell, too. I had not thought of that, though 'twould no fetch so much in Caerhun for grog as her own did. Aye, ask her dad what he did with what he cut off! Ah, ha, ha! (*Staggers about imitating a drunken man cutting off another's hair with a long knife*) An' he might have cut wrong an' got her throat that time in Caerhun. Ah, ha, ha!

MRS. EVANS

Leave this room, ye wanton girl.

CATRIN (*still saucy*)

Aye, so I will. But I will come back, mum, for your son.

MRS. EVANS

Ye will not!

CATRIN

Aye, I could no disappoint him an' you. But when Neli comes, she will come stealin' in after dark.

MRS. EVANS

You wicked girl!

CATRIN

You'll see! Good day, mum.

MRS. EVANS (*looking after her*)

Dear people, such depravity!

[*Stands still, listening to the sounds from the street. Sighs, straightens out a few things on the table, and starts when she hears a firm step turning in at the door. Pedr enters from the kitchen. He has broad shoulders, a sturdy neck, well-shaped ears, a thatch of brown hair turning a little gray at the temples. His mouth is steadfast and impassive. He suggests middle age, yet his expression is that of the boy, innocent, untouched in its pride, with something almost girlish about the eyes.*

PEDR (*taking his cap off, putting down his camera and tripod and stooping to kiss his mother*)

Just in, mam.

MRS. EVANS

I was thinkin' of you. . . . Did ye come past Neli Parry's?

PEDR

Nay, mam dear, I came the short way through the plantations an' in at the back door.

MRS. EVANS

Then ye did not pass her lodgin'?

PEDR

Nay, mam. I was thinkin' I would see you first, have my tea, dee-velope my plate—this time I have the rock, song an' all—an' then take the plate to Neli to see. Dear, dear, up there on the hill above the trees it blew as if it were the top of the world.

MRS. EVANS (*vaguely and still troubled*)

Aye, darlin', an' so 'tis!

PEDR

Not quite that, mam. (*He sinks down at the table*) 'Tis peaceful here.

[*Looks up at the river and the alley-ways of trees.*

MRS. EVANS

Yiss, peaceful if 'tis so!

PEDR

I'm likin' it all.

MRS. EVANS (*still absent-mindedly*)

That is as much as to say you are likin' your own home.

PEDR (*looking at her with frank love*)

I'm lovin' the old house an' the look of it, for it has been kind to others as it has been kind to us; an' I'm lovin' your dear face, mam, — the lines on it make it sweeter.

MRS. EVANS

Tut, you foolish boy!

PEDR

Nay, mam, I am thinkin' that when Neli an' I come to the end, 't will be somethin' like your face!

MRS. EVANS

Yiss, then 'twill be grand indeed. (*Laughs*) The end of life for two people who love each other like an old woman's wrinkled face! Och, Pedr, Pedr, the dear fool that you are!

PEDR

Aye, mam dear, but even death can but confirm love. 'Tis the last blessin' . . .

MRS. EVANS

'Tis a blessin' I could do without! I'll fetch your tea.

PEDR (*noticing her mood for the first time*)
You seem vexed, mam. Has anythin' happened to trouble you?

MRS. EVANS
Nothin' that matters.

PEDR
Nothin'?

MRS. EVANS
Aye, well, that Catrin Vaughan was in lookin' for you, an' that is twice in one afternoon.

PEDR (*his face clouding*)
Was she!

MRS. EVANS
Yiss, tellin' lies today.

PEDR
Tellin' lies? What lies?

MRS. EVANS
Aye, that's it: what lies. (*Going out towards kitchen*) Your tray is ready for you. I will fetch it. (*Goes. Pedr gets up and goes to one of the casement windows, runs his fingers up through the back of his thick hair, shakes his head as if puzzled, and returns to his seat. Mrs. Evans comes in with the tray, tea and scones on it. She sets it down on the little table*)
Here 'tis.

PEDR
Mam, what did she want this time?

MRS. EVANS
To display herself, I'm thinkin'. She had her yellow hair scrambled all over her head, an' she said 'twas the fashion. But it looked to me like nothin'

so much as an accident to a basket of fresh eggs, — an' no so fresh either!

PEDR (*pleased by his mother's comparison*)

Mam dear, ye're wicked an' ye're harsh to Catrin. She's no so bad —

MRS. EVANS

She's no so bad she could be worse! First she tries one thing to trap you an' then another.

PEDR

Trap *me*?

MRS. EVANS

Yiss, an' she would be the world an' the flesh an' the devil to any man who looked on her with desire. God forbid it should be my son!

PEDR

Aye, mam, God forbid! But we cannot be rude to her whatever. She's too smart, but maybe there is no evil in it.

MRS. EVANS

The time is comin' when she will get herself into trouble with her fashions, flauntin' around with those frocks on, an' all her false seemin', her face painted an' powdered, an' her hair dyed.

PEDR

Och, mam, don't! She's pitiful.

MRS. EVANS

Aye, if evil is pitiful, Catrin Vaughan is with her shrewd oglin' eyes an' that painted face. But, if she cannot have you, she will harm Neli.

PEDR

Harm Neli! What can she do to Neli?

MRS. EVANS

Dear Anwyl, ye talk as if human bein's were angels! They're cats, — that's what they are.

PEDR (*laughing*)

Mam dear, ye're savage! Am I a cat?

MRS. EVANS (*smiling*)

Aye well, that is different.

PEDR

But what could Catrin do to Neli?

MRS. EVANS

There is malice, there is gossip, there is slander. She's at work now — this minute!

PEDR

At work? At what?

MRS. EVANS

Well, I dunno, — 'tis no a thing I'm wishin to discuss.

[*Pedr goes over and looks at photograph of young woman with lamb in her arms.*

PEDR

Neli's goodness will defend her whatever.

MRS. EVANS

Well indeed, goodness is right enough in its place, but I'm thinkin' Neli may need a lover, not her goodness, to defend her before this day is over. . . .

PEDR

What is it ye mean, mam?

MRS. EVANS (*not answering his question*)

I'll fetch a light, 'tis growin' dark.

[*Goes out to get one. Pedr looks after her anxiously. She returns with a candle lighted.*

PEDR

Aye, that's better! 'Tis dark early these days.

MRS. EVANS

Yiss, dark early.

PEDR

Mam, what is it ye know an' I do not?

MRS. EVANS

Nothin' at all. . . . Are the scones good?

PEDR

Yiss, an' I am hungry whatever. 'Twas cold up on the mountain.

MRS. EVANS

Did it take you long walkin' from Bettws?

PEDR

Two hours. Aye, but that rock was grand today, the way the wind whistled past it, — I could see the song of the wind like print on a page whatever, only more beautiful. Today I have caught both the rock an' the song.

MRS. EVANS

If you say it is so, 'tis so, Pedr. An' the papers in London an' Liverpool will be praisin' the artist Pedr Evans, still more.

PEDR (*indifferently*)

Yiss. . . . (*Excitedly*) An' mam, the song up there among the rocks was dark an' mysterious like Neli's hair, deep an' yet tender. All the little sounds weavin' in an' out of the great sound like the dark curls around the edges of her hair.

MRS. EVANS

Were they? Well, I am thinkin' ye may hear other sounds weavin' around before the day is out.

PEDR

Mam, what's in your mind?

MRS. EVANS

Which are ye lovin' better, lad, Neli or her hair?

PEDR (*startled*)

Why, mam, why do ye ask? I have never thought. But her hair *is* Neli.

MRS. EVANS

Is it! Well, I'm thinkin' there is much more to Neli Parry than her hair whatever.

PEDR

Aye, but, mam, I could no more think of Neli without that hair — like a frame to her soul — than I could think of you without your — without your —

MRS. EVANS

Without what?

PEDR (*weakly*)

I dunno.

MRS. EVANS

Yiss, that's it. Men are full of notions, an' there's nothin' but food an' drink either a man or woman can miss for long except love. . . . (*Listens*) Hush, there's some one by the step now.

PEDR

Like a child's foot.

MRS. EVANS

The step is hesitatin'.

PEDR (*getting up*)

'Tis dark an' they do not know the way.

MRS. EVANS

I will go see. (*Opens door*) 'Tis Neli Parry!

[*Neli Parry's shapely head is covered with a kerchief from beneath which escapes an abundance of little curls as dark and shadowy as the face is white and sensitive, as irrepressible as the eyes are dreamy. She is clad in Welsh peasant costume, full, short, striped skirt and pretty bodice with full sleeves and open neck, about her a full, scarlet market cloak.*

NELI (*shrinking back*)

Och, Pedr!

[*Mrs. Evans goes into kitchen.*

PEDR

Aye, back early!

NELI (*shrinking still further away and into cloak*)

So early today!

PEDR

So early! Well indeed, aren't you glad to find me here?

NELI (*folding kerchief closer about her head*)

Yiss, yiss, of course, Pedr. But I was lookin' for your mother. I — I — had somethin' to ask her about — she was here — somethin' has happened — I —

PEDR

She's gone into the kitchen, I'm thinkin'.

NELI

I must be tellin' her — an' you an' —

[*She hangs her head and looks with her white face nearly ready to sink to the floor.*

PEDR (*taking cloak from her and putting an arm about her*)

Ye're faint, Neli. Come, sit here by the table, an'

I will give you a cup of tea.

[*Leads her to table. Mrs. Evans comes in with an extra cup.*

MRS. EVANS

Good evenin', my child!

NELI

Och, Mrs. Evans, I —

PEDR

She's faint, mam.

NELI

Nay, I am in trouble. Somethin' has happened. I —

MRS. EVANS

What is it, child?

NELI

Mrs. Evans, I came to tell you somethin', — I came — I came — to — tell you — what — they —

[*Begins to tremble.*

MRS. EVANS

There, child, drink your tea first an' then is time enough to tell when you are steadier!

NELI

Nay, I must now. I came to tell you how it —

MRS. EVANS (*standing still, and looking directly at Neli*)

Take off your kerchief, child!

[*Neli turns limp and sinks back against the chair.*

NELI (*raising her hands to either side of head*)

I — I — I — cannot! But ye know.

MRS. EVANS

I see how it is, my child. Maybe I understand

more than ye think I know whatever, but not everythin'.

NELI

Not what I have come to tell you, Mrs. Evans. I have deceived you an' Pedr, an' then they — I —

MRS. EVANS

Ye are makin' too much of it. Believe an old woman who tells you, my child, that on the windy side of the grave nothin' much matters but true love. An' that you have, for Pedr has never been anythin' but true. Ye can try to trust him. (*She lays her hand on Neli's head and Neli shrinks away, holding the kerchief down on her head*) Yiss, I see how it is! But you must settle it between yourselves. Drink your tea.

[*She goes out.*

NELI (*trembling*)

So now I must be tellin' you!

PEDR (*hotly*)

Indeed, dearie, if it hurts you, you will not be tellin' me!

NELI

But, Pedr, Catrin Vaughan — alas, I must tell you! (*She lifts her hand as if she were about to point to something and then drops it*) Catrin Vaughan knew; an' this mornin' a boy —

PEDR

I'm no carin' about Catrin Vaughan or about any one else.

NELI

She said when you knew 'twould settle all, an' —

PEDR

Dear little heart, ye are makin' yourself sick over this!

NELI

Och, I must tell you! She sent him in at the window, an' —

[*Again comes the futile motion of the hand.*

PEDR

You shall not!

NELI

Yes, now, now! (*She lifts her hand*) Pedr, I — I have —

PEDR (*seizing uplifted hand*)

No, Neli, no!

[*He puts his fingers over her mouth and draws her to him.*

NELI

Then you have not passed my house?

PEDR

Nay, I came the short way by the plantation an' in at the back door. Why?

NELI

Nothin' — nothin' at all.

PEDR

Is that why you spoke of it?

NELI (*struggling to free herself from his arm*)

That's it, Pedr. I must — I must tell you! He got in at the window, an' Catrin Vaughan had —

PEDR (*placing hand over mouth*)

If 'tis somethin' secret that troubles you, I'm not carin' to know now. Wait until we're married.

NELI (*moaning*)

No, no, that would not be fair to you, 'twould be deceivin' you.

PEDR (*sternly*)

Was it some other man?

NELI (*sitting up straight*)

Och, a man! It was an' it was not. Aye, 'twas nothin' so simple as a man whatever!

PEDR

Nothin' so simple! Are ye implyin' that virtue —

NELI

Nay, Pedr, but if you knew — 'tis much worse — 'twas hangin' out —

PEDR (*covering her mouth more firmly with his hand and drawing her closer*)

If 'twas no any man, not now, little lamb!

[*She sits quite still, her head on his shoulder; she sighs.*

NELI

Well, 'twas no a man in the sense you mean, Pedr, for I have never loved any man but you.

PEDR

Aye, well, nothin' else matters. (*He pats her face and draws her still nearer him*) Ye seem so little an' so light, nothin' but a child!

NELI (*for an instant she gives up her purpose*)

Och, Pedr, I'm growin' old.

PEDR

Old nothin'!

NELI

Aye, but I'm over thirty.

PEDR

Pooh, that's nothin'!

NELI

Yes, 'tis; an' as I grew older you would mind even more if it didn't — if it didn't — if ye saw me without —

PEDR

So 'tis that! Well indeed, mam has not a tooth of her own in her head an' I'm lovin' her the same whatever!

NELI (*sitting up straight*)

My teeth are my own whatever!

PEDR (*apologetically*)

Aye well, 'tis no matter!

NELI

Indeed, it does matter! I'm no wantin' any of my teeth.

PEDR (*troubled*)

I meant I was just thinkin' that if they're once out, they do not as a rule come in again, — that is, not at mam's age.

NELI

Your mam is an old woman.

PEDR

Yiss, maybe yours will be comin' in again.

NELI

I said I had no need of any. But — (*laying her head again on his shoulder*) I have need of somethin' else. Pedr, if I were very old — say forty-five whatever — an' I *hadn't* any teeth —

PEDR (*holding her away from him and looking a little indignant*)

I'm forty-five whatever an' my teeth are my own!

NELI

Yiss, yiss, but I'm only sayin' if I had no teeth would ye love me?

PEDR

I said I was lovin' mam the same.

NELI

Aye well, I'd no be *quite* so old. But if I had wrinkles an' oh — an' oh — when I get to be forty — if it had not — if it had not —

[*She half sobs.*

PEDR

Tut, I'm forty-five whatever an' I have my teeth an' not so many wrinkles. What do my wrinkles matter?

NELI (*sobbing*)

Nothin', nothin' at all! But I love you.

PEDR (*indignant*)

What's this ye are implyin'! that I do not love you? I'm thinkin' love can get over a little difficulty like that whatever. Indeed, I'm thinkin' what with love an' time we'd scarcely notice it. (*Reflectively*) I dunno, if we did notice it, I'm thinkin' we'd love each other better. Indeed with fewer teeth, somehow there'd be more to love whatever!

[*Draws her head to his shoulder again. Neli smiles a little.*

NELI

Do you remember that once you said that my hair was like a frame to my soul? Do you remember?

PEDR

Yiss.

NELI

An' you said that you could not think what my face would be like without it.

PEDR

Yiss, I cannot think what your face would be like without —

[*Starts to push back her kerchief and hair.*

NELI

Pedr, don't, don't! (*Sighs*) But I was hopin' ye would see for yourself or understand.

PEDR

Aye, but how can I see when I dunno what I am to see, or understand when I have no comprehension whatever what 'tis all about? A woman plays leap-frog with a man's thoughts an' then expects him to know what she is about.

NELI (*gravely*)

Yiss, an' now before we stand in church together is the time to make all clear. So you can see for yourself. If you will help me, I will go fetch — (*There is a sudden loud rap on the door*) Who 's that?

PEDR

I dunno. Shall I go see?

[*Mrs. Evans comes quickly into the room from kitchen.*

MRS. EVANS (*whispering*)

Neli, child, go into the kitchen! I'm thinkin' I know who that is.

[*Neli takes one long look at Mrs. Evans.*

NELI (*in low voice to Pedr, looking at him significantly and expecting him to join her*)
Yiss, I will go out that way.
[*The rap is repeated. Neli goes into kitchen.*

PEDR (*looking bewildered from one to the other*)
But, mam, whatev —
[*Mrs. Evans opens door.*

MRS. EVANS (*calling back into room*)
Aye, Pedr, 'tis Catrin Vaughan, as I thought. (*To Catrin*) Ye have come back!

CATRIN (*forcing way in*)
Yiss, Mrs. Evans, mum, I have it here.
[*Holds up paper bag.*

PEDR
Good evenin', Catrin Vaughan.

CATRIN
If ye hold it up to the candle like this, ye can see through without openin' the poke.

MRS. EVANS (*looking alarmed and whispering to Catrin*)
Ye're no to be showin' him that.

CATRIN
Aye, but I had the boy climb up to where it was hangin' —

PEDR
Is there somethin' inside to show me, Catrin Vaughan?

MRS. EVANS (*snatching bag from Catrin*)
She has nothin', — nothin' at all! (*Making off towards kitchen*) 'Tis somethin' for household use I was askin' Catrin to bring me.

CATRIN (*laughing*)

Oo, Mrs. Evans, mum, is that Welsh truth?

MRS. EVANS (*at kitchen door*)

Say one word about it, Catrin Vaughan, an' ye will never set foot in this cottage again!

PEDR

But, mam, what —

MRS. EVANS

'Tis nothin', Pedr, just a little surprise for you, — somethin' that has been hangin' up in the market to ripen.

CATRIN (*bursts into a shrill peal of laughter*)

Och, dear me, to ripen! Just a little surprise has been hangin' up to ripen!

MRS. EVANS (*shaking finger at Catrin*)

Ye wicked girl, be still!

[*Mrs. Evans goes out with paper bag.*

PEDR

What did ye bring, Catrin, that's so mysterious?

CATRIN (*half fear and half jest*)

I could no disobey your mam. When she opens the poke, maybe she will tell you herself whatever.

PEDR (*businesslike*)

Aye well then, Catrin, what can I do for you today?

CATRIN

Dear anwyl, it *had* slipped my mind — um — m — well, (*inventing a need*) I will be havin' three of those new picture post cards you made.

PEDR (*opening the top door of the tridarn and taking the desired post cards from a shelf*)

Yiss, three.

CATRIN

They're to go to my Uncle in Ameriky.

PEDR

Aye, they've no such post cards over there. They have much for the stomach but little for the soul.

CATRIN

Yiss, that's what my Uncle in Ameriky writes an' he ought to know! Been takin' more photographs lately, Pedr?

PEDR

Not many.

CATRIN (*her pink face wrinkling with mingled mirth and deviltry*)

I'm thinkin' you'll be goin' down Caerhun way some day soon.

PEDR

Caerhun? Aye, if Neli wishes.

CATRIN

'Tis pretty there an' it would be good for an artist like you.

PEDR (*slipping the post cards into an envelope*)

Yiss, 'twas Neli's home whatever!

CATRIN

Aye, an' there's a quaint old church there. 'Tis next to that church that old Parry, her drunken dad, lives.

PEDR

Here are the post cards, Catrin.

CATRIN

Aye, thank you. . . . 'Tis there old Parry gets drunk as a faucet when he has anythin' to sell whatever. . . . Had it a mind to, I'm thinkin', the old church could tell much. (*Comes closer to him and tries to take hold of a button on his coat. Pedr moves away*) An', Pedr, I could be tellin' you somethin' else —

PEDR

Tut, you have your post cards, Catrin Vaughan.

CATRIN

Yiss, an' 'twas there he beat her till she ran away from home, an' they say —

PEDR (*interrupting her*)

Now you must be excusin' me, for I am busy.

CATRIN

Busy! Ye are always busy when there is mention of Neli Parry.

PEDR

I have no wish to hear anythin' about her except from her own lips whatever!

CATRIN

Well, ask Neli herself what it is she's in a position to tell you today that you don't know.

PEDR

In a position to tell me today?

CATRIN (*making a motion as if with knife around head*)

Perhaps you will be wantin' to know before you marry her!

PEDR (*stiffly*)

Good evenin'!

CATRIN

Aye, I'm goin'!

(*A shout of ribald laughter comes from the street*)

They're at it again. An' I heard them sayin' to-night when they were first laughin' outside her window, "Ffi, the poor fellow, what will he do now?" An' another sayin' you could not expect more, an' he was tappin' his head, —

PEDR

I said good evenin' to you, Catrin Vaughan.

CATRIN (*laughing*)

Good evenin'. But ask your mam what is a woman's chief glory.

PEDR (*repeating*)

A woman's chief glory?

CATRIN

An' ask her where she has it!

[*She goes. Mrs. Evans enters hastily the instant Catrin goes.*

MRS. EVANS

They are mockin' some one outside. Where is Neli?

PEDR (*rubbing his head perplexedly*)

Was she not in the kitchen when you went out?

MRS. EVANS

Nay, or why should I ask you!

PEDR

Aye, well, I recall it now: she was goin' home to fetch somethin'.

MRS. EVANS

To fetch somethin'!

PEDR

Mam, what is it all about?

MRS. EVANS

Dear people, she will not find it, for I have it here.

PEDR (*still absorbed*)

Mam, Catrin Vaughan bid me ask you what is a woman's chief glory. I suppose it was just her hair. But is it somethin' respec-ta-ble, — somethin' about a woman a man about to be married should know whatever?

[*Neli comes running hastily through the kitchen door, hands out, half crying.*

NELI

Och, Pedr, Pedr, it was not there! The boys had taken it away again, an' — an' when they saw me, they mocked me.

PEDR (*angrily*)

The boys mockin' you. What for?

NELI

I have nothin' now but what is left to show you.

[*Strips kerchief away from head and discloses a cropped head well covered with thick dark curls.*

PEDR (*looking at her, his eyes growing bigger*)

Yiss, I see — now, — that bobbed hair!

MRS. EVANS

Ye mean ye did no hang it out yourself for Pedr to see.

NELI

Och, *I* — hang — it out for Pedr to see, mum? This mornin' Catrin Vaughan sent a boy in by the window before I was awake an' —

PEDR (*staring at her*)
Aye, I understand now!

MRS. EVANS
Poor lamb!

NELI
An' he hung it to the eaves where I could not reach it. All day it blew in the wind. I could no go to work. She told them, an' on their way home from work they mocked me!

PEDR
So that is the work of Catrin Vaughan!

MRS. EVANS
Aye, an' the results of it are here in the poke. [*Holds up paper bag.*

PEDR
I understand now.

NELI
Och, Pedr, have I lost your love too?

PEDR
Are you thinkin' a tress of hair more or less would make any difference to true love?

NELI
Yiss, but you said mine was the frame to my soul.

PEDR
So I did.

MRS. EVANS
Aye, an' I mind you said her hair was Neli an' Neli was her hair!

PEDR
Yiss, so I did.

MRS. EVANS (*starting to open paper bag*)
Shall I show this to you?

PEDR (*drawing back*)

Nay, mam dear, nay, do not! Not now!

MRS. EVANS (*grimly*)

Well, 'tis almost the whole of one woman's chief glory that lies here in this bag stolen by a bad boy because a wicked woman told him to do it!

PEDR

Take it away! (*To Neli*) Who was the boy so I can thrash him?

NELI

Aye well, Pedr, he was just a bit of a lad! An' ye know who the woman was.

PEDR

I cannot thrash her, — 'tis no in a man's nature.

NELI (*drawing one of the curls on her head out straight*)

This is all I really — really have now, Pedr, — it's about all that Dad left when he was angry and hacked it off.

PEDR (*unsmiling*)

'Tis enough!

[*Pedr cocks his head critically to one side, squints his eyes critically, and is silent, — studying her cropped hair.*

NELI

Why are you so still? Why do you look so?

PEDR (*still photographically squinting and cocking his head, and always with solemnity*)

I was thinkin' how pretty bobbed hair is. 'Twas always the little curls I liked, and they show the shape of the head. The rest of it has been just in the way whatever.

MRS. EVANS (*throwing up hands*)

Likin' that bold bobbed hair whatever! Dear people, listen to that! None knows better than his mother or his wife how full a man's head is of foolishness!

CURTAIN

LOVE LETTERS

CHARACTERS

Samson Jones, pastor of Gelligaer, North Wales.
Dolly Morgan, a charming young widow.
Jane Elin, Gelligaer's pretty schoolmistress.
Keturah, the Reverend Samson Jones's ancient servant.
Deb, the Widow Morgan's servant.

LOVE LETTERS

SCENE: *the Pastor's study is a beautiful humble old room in a sixteenth century peasant's cottage with one door at the back, a quaint capacious Dutch door, opening out into the street; the other door is at the right side opening into the kitchen. Through the open upper half of the big Dutch door can be seen some detail of an old Welsh village. At the left of the room is the Pastor's study table and from a big window beside it the late afternoon light falling on it. By the street door is a bookcase.*

Keturah appears at the door leading from the kitchen. She is ancient, bright of eye, grim and humorous of mouth, long-nosed and sour of face. Her white hair is covered with a Welsh mob cap, a kerchief is over her old bent shoulders, and a full short skirt falls below her knees. Her head swings from side to side observing everything, as she mutters.

She peers over the table, and picks up his sermon from a piled up litter of papers.

KETURAH (*impatiently*)

Sermon! I'll put it where he'll no forget it! [*Puts it down, after clearing space in centre of table. Then she rummages around for something else, picking up things, squinting at them, setting*

them down with disgust or disappointment
Nothin' new! . . . Dear people! . . . Dull! . . . Nothin' at all! . . .

[*She goes over to bookshelf by street door. She squats on the floor by lower shelf. She is just reaching forward to take out a book when she espies something on the edge of the shelf, and starts back. She moistens the tip of one finger and touches the shelf with caution, then looks at her fingers*

Dust whatever!

[*She lifts her petticoat and wipes the dust off, then continues the search. She takes out two or three books and reveals two packages of letters. She chooses one package, takes a letter out and begins to read. She cocks an eye sidewise on the letter and picks out the words but does not speak them. Occasionally she breaks out with one.*

KETURAH

Me — 'tis me — (*looks pleased*) What is this? "Cra-crab-bed," dear people!

[*Looks angry, jumps up, and she looks more and more angry as she reads. Evidently furious, she hobbles around, beating the letter with her forefinger. Suddenly the street door opens and Deb, the Widow Morgan's young and cherry-cheeked and light-hearted servant, enters.*

DEB (*covering her mouth with her hand and laughing*)

There ye are, readin' the Master's love letters again!

KETURAH

Dear God, what a lie! I'm dustin'!

DEB

Is it so?

KETURAH

Yiss, I'm dustin'! I am!

DEB

Dustin'! (*Laughs*) When the Mistress last took me to Liverpool —

KETURAH

Aye, those ungodly journeys!

DEB

Well, wait, an' she took me to a play —

KETURAH (*scandalized*)

Ye mean ye have sat, one foot fair in hell, in the midst of the evils of play-actin'?

DEB (*sweetly*)

Yiss, an' in that play was a servant, but she was pretty an' had a big feather du-uster in her hand, a smart duster she had.

KETURAH

Aye, I'll warrant she did, an' 'twas made from feathers from the devil's tail.

DEB

There's no one should know better what sort of a bird the devil is than you do.

KETURAH

Is it praise or insult?

DEB

How can I tell? But what I am tellin' is that servant was readin' her mistress's love letters whatever!

KETURAH (*rubbing her left leg to distract Deb*)
Was she — Ow! Ow! . . . Nay, but one letter. . . . Ow!

DEB
What is it now?

KETURAH
Ow! 'Tis a pain, — a pain in me left leg.

DEB (*indifferently*)
Well, 'tis too bad, but 'tis the effect of old age, an' old age is never comin' alone.

KETURAH (*ceasing rubbing*)
Not comin' alone?

DEB
Nay, no more than youth comes without love, nor middle age without comfort.

KETURAH (*sharply*)
Wisdom of babes an' sucklin's! My right leg is as old as the left, an' nothin' has come to that whatever!

DEB
Well indeed then, what is it?

KETURAH (*beginning to whack the letter with her finger again*)
I am angry whatever, — angry all the way through.

DEB
Was it my Mistress's letters ye were readin' or Jane Elin the School's?

KETURAH
Neither, — that is, just one letter.

DEB
Which?

KETURAH

From the Widow Dolly Morgan's letters, — one she wrote before the old people died.

DEB

What was my Mistress sayin' that was no to your likin'?

KETURAH (*handing letter to Deb and pointing to passage*)

'Tis too bad for me to read again, — aye, a scandal to be sayin' such light words about an old woman who has always done her duty —

DEB

Yiss, overdone it! (*Begins to study letter*) Dear me, 'tis difficult to read whatever: "I will not mind Keturah's cra — Keturah's cra-crab — Keturah's crabbed —" I have it! (*Covers mouth and laughs merrily*) Dear me, dear me!

KETURAH

If 'tis so amusin', maybe I did not read it correctly, for I saw nothin' funny in what the Widow Dolly Morgan said!

DEB

Dear people, my Mistress has a way of hittin' things off!

KETURAH

Maybe 'twas not the same as what I read?

DEB

Aye, well, a different point of view whatever makes just the difference in everythin'. Shall I read it?

KETURAH

Yiss.

DEB (*reading*)

"Darling Dearest, I will not mind Keturah's crabbed old face. As you say, it is not possible for her character to be as sour as her face." (*Laughs again*)

KETURAH

Is all that there? (*Snatches letter and squints, trying to read*) Dear people, what ingratitude! (*Deb giggles loudly*) What ye laughin' at?

DEB

At life, an' because 'tis so true an' (*laughing*) serves ye right for readin' letters not your own whatever like that bad woman I saw in the play —

KETURAH

Tut, comparin' me to a bad woman? An' I would not even see a play, — let alone act in one! The devil is in them all whatever! But 'tis my duty as a God-fearin' servant to follow his every step —

DEB (*laughs*)

An' read his every letter! (*Sobering and a little malicious*) How do ye follow his every step, Keturah?

KETURAH

The Master keeps the Widow Morgan's letters on the right side, an' Jane Elin's on the left side. (*Kneels down painfully and points out arrangements*) So one day I read the Widow Morgan's an' the next I read Jane Elin's.

[*Holds up one bunch of letters.*

DEB

Well indeed, 'tis a system, — the sheep an' the goats!

[*Keturah holds out other package of letters. A framed daguerreotype drops out.*

KETURAH

What was that?

DEB (*picking it up*)

A picture of my Mistress.

KETURAH

Give it to me!

DEB (*mischievously*)

If I was to say the Pastor would marry my Mistress after all, — even with the banns bein' read tomorrow for the third time in chapel for himself an' Jane Elin, would ye believe that now, would ye?

KETURAH (*pondering judicially*)

If her parents had died six months ago, yiss. But now that he is betrothed to Jane Elin the School an' the banns have been read twice an' are to be read tomorrow for the third an' last time, he must marry her.

DEB

Yiss, but the Widow's Father an' Mother died the day after the Pastor became betrothed to Jane Elin the School.

KETURAH

Aye, 'twas God's will it should happen so!

DEB (*disgusted*)

Tricks o' fate, I say. Ye're old an' dry, Keturah, but even you might have cried to hear my Mistress weep when the old people died.

KETURAH (*agreeably for her*)

Aye, 'tis unjust the way some folks have of skippin' off to heaven!

DEB

If ye could but see her sufferin' now! In her loneliness today she has been pacin' up an' down like somethin' caged.

KETURAH

Indeed, cages would be the best arrangement possible for them both!

DEB

Ye mean so they could not get out to each other?

KETURAH

Aye, houses are loose affairs!

DEB (*patting her bosom*)

I dunno, but I have the feelin' here that somethin' is comin' today, aye, somethin's comin'.

KETURAH

Somethin' comin'?

DEB

Yiss, my Mistress is rich both in love an' in purse, an' 'tis a combination whatever!

KETURAH

Jane Elin is rich, too, an' that in character!

DEB (*a bit scornfully*)

Yiss, gold of a sort but no so powerful as it once was.

KETURAH

There is none but speaks well of Jane Elin.

DEB

There is none that speaks ill of my Mistress.

KETURAH (*snappishly*)

She's had one husband, an' that is enough for any woman whatever.

DEB

Too much for most of them till they get the right one! Does the Pastor go to see Jane Elin the School?

KETURAH (*with triumph*)

Since last Sabbath only he has been *three* times to visit Jane Elin the School.

DEB

Dear me!

KETURAH

Aye, an' this afternoon for the last time before the third readin' of the banns in chapel tomorrow, she is comin' to tea.

DEB (*troubled*)

Is she?

KETURAH

Yiss, an' he's over there *now* with her whatever!

DEB

Is he! An' she comin' to Gelligaer three months ago, knowin' nothin' of the past, — as innocent as a lamb of all that went before! (*Footsteps are heard coming*) Some one's comin' down the street, Keturah!

KETURAH

Maybe 'tis the Master an' Jane Ellin comin' back together.

[*She hurriedly tries to replace books and letters.*

DEB

They're almost here! Quick.

KETURAH

Ow, how did they go?

[*Finally stuffs letters in behind books.*

DEB

Are they right?

KETURAH

Nay, they're not whatever — (*Her hand is reaching out to straighten out the letters just as the door opens. She draws her hand back and begins to rub it up and down her leg*) Ow! Ow!

[*Samson Jones, dejected and oblivious, comes in alone from the street. He is young, clerical, pale, desperate, handsome. He walks in with his chin in the air, as if he were imploring help from some unseen power. He is a trifle theatrical but sincere.*

DEB (*making a curtsey*)

Good mornin', sir!

JONES (*not looking, but thinking he is speaking to Keturah*)

Ah — you, Nurse. (*Lowers chin, brushes hand wearily over eyes and sees Deb. He brightens*) Oh, 'tis Deb, how is your —

KETURAH (*wailing suddenly*)

Ow, my right leg, my right leg!

JONES (*absent-mindedly*)

Dear me, which leg was it when I went out whatever?

KETURAH

My left leg, Master, — ow, the pain!

JONES

Well then, what are you doin' on your knees on the floor, Keturah?

KETURAH

Aye, Master, I'm gettin' old to be goin' down on my hands an' knees for all the hard work has to be done on your books.

JONES

Why do it?

KETURAH

Ye would no be preachin' your sermons half so well — ow! ow! — if there was no order here. . . . Have ye finished your work on the sermon, Master?

JONES

Nay, I meant —

KETURAH

Hell is —

DEB (*pulling her up from the floor*)

Come! Get up!

KETURAH

Hell is — is paved with good intentions, an' the Sabbath is tomorrow, Master, an' the third an' last readin' of the banns for you an' Jane Elin the School.

JONES (*dejectedly*)

Aye, the third readin'!

KETURAH

Ow, ow, what stiffness!

DEB (*to Keturah*)

Come! (*To Jones*) Good day, sir.

[*Deb curtsies and they start to go out by kitchen door.*

JONES (*stepping forward*)

Ah, Deb, is —

[*Stops.*

DEB (*turning*)

Yiss?

[*Keturah hobbles over to the study table and picks up sermon.*

JONES (*hopelessly*)

No matter.

KETURAH (*tapping on desk with bony old hand*)

Here is your sermon, Master, I set out for ye. With the last readin' of the banns, they'll be expectin' ye to preach as never before.

JONES

I've no forgot the day.

DEB (*to Keturah, made anxious by the old woman's impertinence*)

Come along!

KETURAH (*looking around with irritating composure*)

The study is needin' some flowers. I'll be fetchin' ye in some in a minute.

JONES (*vaguely*)

Yiss, yiss — nay, I am no needin' any — yet!

DEB

Come!

[*Deb curtsies again and the two servants go out. Jones goes over to table, sits down, drops his head on his arms.*

JONES

Dear God! (*He picks up his sermon. He tilts his chin in the air and he begins to mutter determinedly, alternately opening and closing his eyes. He shouts loudly some of the time and mutters to himself the rest*) Planet shining in the night — morning star of the revival — the affections and the will — the affec — the affections — the affections and the will —

[*Keturah appears again. She carries some pansies in a glass. Samson Jones, his eyes tight closed, his lips moving, does not hear her coming.*

KETURAH (*not without malice, setting the flowers down with a bang*)

Fresh flowers for your tea with the Schoolmistress, Master.

JONES (*jumping*)

Aye, — oh — yes, tea. Did you say tea was here, Nurse?

KETURAH

Nay, flowers, Master. Did you ask Jane Elin the School?

JONES (*patiently*)

Yiss, Keturah, yiss, yiss, I asked her. She is comin'.

KETURAH

No matter who was asked for tea, I can see ye are thinkin' of some one else.

JONES

Tut! I was memorizing my sermon whatever.

KETURAH

Thirty years ago when I held you in my arms, I did not —

JONES (*for once crisply*)

Well, don't now!

[*A shrill train whistle is heard, more like a cry than anything else.*

KETURAH

'Tis the narrow gauge from Qwyllyn. An' I do wish I was takin' it to see your Lady Mother.

JONES

Keturah, I am not a boy any more.

KETURAH

Yiss, yiss, there are things she should know.

JONES

I insist you cease —

KETURAH

Aye, Master, an' you cease goin' quite on the downfall runnin' after light-minded idle widows.

JONES

I am runnin' after no one.

KETURAH

Aye, an' in that half truth lies the trouble. I will bring the tea as soon as I see Jane Elin the School comin'.

[*She turns and goes out kitchen door, rubbing her shin and grunting. Samson Jones watches her for a minute, mutters,* "The Devil" *and then picks up the pansies. He takes one out, holds it up, kisses it. Keturah, having disappeared now reappears, and her head is seen bobbing up and down behind Dutch door.*

JONES

Aye, 'tis so like Dolly! (*Kisses it fervently again. Then picks up sermon. He shuts his eyes tight and again begins the memorizing*) A planet shining in the night is this morning star of the revival. (*Opens his eyes*) Aye, that went well! (*Picks up another pansy*) 'Tis the color of her hair. (*Chokes, closes his eyes tight and goes on with the memorizing, — including appropriate gestures*) Brook in the desert — arid waste — arid arid — arid — waste — Dan to — Dan to — O God, postpone tomorrow forever an' ever, Amen! (*Crushes pansy*) Dolly, Dolly, I love you, uch! (*Sinks into study chair. Pulls himself together and goes on with the sermon*) Dan — Dan to — Dan to Beer — Beersheba — Dan to — O damn! [*He strikes the table with his fist and leaps out of the chair. Grasping his head, he goes striding up and down. He covers his eyes, moans. He goes back to the table, picks up his sermon and hurls it through upper part of the Dutch door. It strikes Keturah's head. She squeals and disappears. At the sound he looks around furtively, glances out, sees no one there, and goes over to the bookcase. He gets down on his knees, and from behind the books on the lowest shelf he takes out the framed daguerreotype. This he holds up, kissing rapturously.*

I love you so! (*Kissing the picture again*) But — och! (*Rips off one edge of frame*) Dolly! [*Rips off other side. He drops the pieces on the floor and his head on the top of the bookcase.*

His shoulders heave. He stretches out his arms once. Suddenly Dolly Morgan is framed in the upper half of the old Dutch door. She sees Samson's back; then she sees sermon on the pavement. She picks it up and looks from it to Samson. Dolly is about thirty with a charming face. Her features are round and childlike, her eyelashes deeply fringed. She has a coronet of hair and a contour of chin giving the countenance the circular aspect and soft depth of a pansy. Her dress is not the dress of the peasant, but graceful and quaint, dainty, old-fashioned.

DOLLY (*pleadingly*)
Samson!

JONES (*opening eyes*)
Uch, is Jane Elin —

DOLLY
Samson, not Jane Elin!

JONES (*swinging around*)
The Devil!

DOLLY
I am not the Devil!

JONES (*with arms outspread*)
You? Is it you?

DOLLY
Yiss, Dolly! Your Dolly! I shall die if —

JONES (*still incredulous*)
Dolly? Uch, the Devil!

DOLLY (*coming in*)
Nay, your sermon, not the Devil!
[*She gives it to him and then closes upper half of Dutch door.*

JONES

My sermon.

DOLLY

Aye, 'twas lyin' on the pavement.

JONES

Hundred an' a thousand! (*Goes toward her, arms extended*) I will take you both.

[*Folds her in his arms.*

DOLLY (*beginning to whimper a little*)

I shall die if —

JONES

Dolly! It *is* you! O world's value! O white sugar!

DOLLY (*eyes red, voice quavering*)

I am so lonely, Samson, och, so lonely!

JONES

Och, white love, I —I must — (*Puts her away from him*) but next week — (*Struggles to take even his glance away from her appealing face*) Aye — the heart is complex — terribly confused —

[*Dolly drops into a chair and slips back her scarf. Her chin trembles pitifully.*

DOLLY

I am so lonely, Samson. I thought perhaps you had forgotten me.

JONES (*shifting awkwardly from one foot to the other*)

No, I've not indeed! But — the heart — the mind — is a sea — terrible things dwell therein — Oh God!

DOLLY

Well, an' don't you love me any more? I thought you would never forget that we —

JONES

Aye, I love you, but — but —

[*Dolly jumps up and rushes upon him, throwing her arms about him like an impulsive child.*

DOLLY

Och, then, nothin' else matters, neither banns nor nothin' at all whatever!

JONES

But my pledge — an' tomorrow the third readin' of the banns — Jane Elin — an' I

[*Holds her close, groaning.*

DOLLY

Let us fly — let us go to —

JONES

Go to where?

[*Kisses her hair passionately.*

DOLLY

Fly to the ends of the earth. What does it matter?

JONES

I am committed to Jane Elin — O God, this is sin!

DOLLY

This is love!

[*They kiss. She clings to him eagerly, her arms about him. The last vestige of Samson Jones's resolution is quenched. The door knocker gives a clap. They spring apart.*

JONES

Some one has come!

[*Knocker claps again.*

DOLLY

Who is it?

[*Arranging hair, etc.*

JONES

If —

[*Keturah opens the kitchen door and hobbles across the room slowly, eyeing them glumly every instant. Another gentle clap.*

JONES (*with a decision he does not feel*)

Keturah, the door knocker —

KETURAH

'Tis why I am here — I heard that, an' more!

[*Dolly is still making furtive attempts to straighten her hair and is first to recover some composure as Jane Elin is admitted. Jane Elin is young, slim, shy, with a long delicately-featured oval face, big trusting blue eyes, and sun-filled abundant hair. She wears a charming old-fashioned gown covered with sprigged flowers and a pretty, wide garden hat.*

Yiss, Miss, the Master is here.

[*Keturah traverses the room again observing everything and goes slowly through the garden door. Jane Elin looks questioningly from Samson Jones to Dolly Morgan and back again.*

JANE ELIN (*looking from one to the other*)

Shall I come again?

DOLLY

Nay, Jane Elin dear!

JANE ELIN

I was just —

DOLLY

'Twas a matter of business I was discussin' with Samson.

JONES

Aye, business, Jane Elin dear.

DOLLY

Connected with the death of my parents.

JONES (*taking Jane Elin's hand*)

Very connected. Yiss, sad business, my dear, — a very sad business!

DOLLY

An' what was not finished can wait. It is an old grief, an' grief like old love has to wait sometimes.

JONES

Aye, sometimes!

DOLLY (*kissing Jane Elin*)

Good-by, Jane Elin. (*Steps on piece of frame and sees broken frame and daguerreotype on floor*) Dear me, what's this? (*Stoops and picks up pieces, studies the handful*) Somethin' broken? (*Looks accusingly at Samson Jones*) Samson, 'tis *my* picture! You destroyed — you —

JONES

No, not I — I did not exactly — later I will explain — I —

DOLLY (*distant and changed*)

Explanation is unnecessary. I have these broken pieces — Good-by, Jane Elin.

JONES

Och, Dolly, let me —

[*She is gone.*

JANE ELIN (*looking after her*)

Is she not happy?

JONES (*gulping*)

Since her Mother and Father — old family friends — as her Pastor —

JANE ELIN

I see, Samson, but wonderful whatever to have had them so long.

JONES

Yiss, but somethin' else —

[*Samson Jones stands with down-dropped eyes fingering objects on his writing table.*

JANE ELIN (*going up to him swiftly*)

You are pale —

JONES (*taking her hand*)

My sermon —

JANE ELIN

Could I not help? Do you not need me?

JONES

Yiss, I need to — to talk with you — I —

JANE ELIN

Dear me, has anythin' gone wrong —

JONES

I have been meanin' this last week—it seemed only right before the readin' of the banns to-

morrow — I don't see how it is possible — I — now that this has happened —

JANE ELIN

What has happened? Och, tell me, Samson, tell me quickly, what is it?

JONES (*looking helplessly in every direction for help*)

Well, next week — now that — if — my Mother —

JANE ELIN

Dear me, is your Mother ill?

JONES (*greatly relieved and as if a light had suddenly come*)

Aye, that's it — och, I have endured it as long as I could in silence — it is too horrible —

JANE ELIN

Dear anwyl, Samson, she *is* ill — (*Jones nods his head mournfully*) Is it that bad?

JONES

Yiss. I have — I have — (*Looks wildly at bookcase*) I have somethin' to give you — if I die — it —

[*Reaches over to bookcase, tosses out books, seizes right-hand package of letters, holds it.*

JANE ELIN

You are goin' to give me back my letters?

[*Turns pale.*

JONES

Yiss, every one—every precious line you ever wrote me I entrust to you. (*Shrinks away from him as he extends the letters*) Och, Jane Elin, such a treasure as man never had before since the mornin' star rose on Creation!

JANE ELIN (*practical*)

But if your Mother is so ill, can we not be married at once, say tomorrow after the third readin' of the banns?

JONES

Nay — impossible — not that, but somethin' else you can do for me — I shall never forget — Och, dear God, I must go — I — (*Forces letters upon her, hunts for hat, snatches it*) Keep these — safely — for *us* — if Keturah — Keep them — till I come — I can trust no one but you —

[*Embraces her.*

JANE ELIN

Can we not go to your Mother at once,— together? Och, Samson — an' be married later, I —

JONES (*looking at watch*)

There is not time — I must go! (*Shrill whistles from Qwyllyn narrow gauge*) There is just time to catch the narrow gauge at Qwyllyn.

JANE ELIN (*breaking a little*)

Och, Samson, take me with you!

JONES

Dear one, good-by, och, good-by! Tell Keturah! [*Kisses her, claps hat on head, rushes through street door and is gone, leaving Jane Elin standing in the middle of the study, looking out after him through the upper half of the Dutch door, a big package of letters in her hands. Keturah comes in.*

KETURAH

What was that runnin'? (*Sees that Jones is gone*) The Master?

JANE ELIN (*not looking at letters*)

Why did he not tell me before that she was ill?

KETURAH

Did he go out with the Widow Jenkin Morgan?

JANE ELIN

Who?

KETURAH

Well, Miss, has the Widow Morgan gone?

JANE ELIN

Yiss.

KETURAH

Was it they runnin' like that?

JANE ELIN

Nay, she went some time ago. But is his Mother very ill?

KETURAH (*jerkily*)

His *Mother?*

JANE ELIN

The Master's Mother.

KETURAH

Ill, ye said! (*Mouth setting grimly*)

JANE ELIN

Yiss, he said so.

KETURAH

Dear me! 'Tis news!

JANE ELIN

He told me to tell you he had gone to take the narrow gauge.

KETURAH (*acidly*)
Did he so!

JANE ELIN
Is she *very* ill?

KETURAH (*with mouth set like iron*)
Aye, she must be! An' I am sure now she will be worse before she is better!

JANE ELIN
Och, 'tis too bad!

KETURAH (*pointing to letters*)
What's that, Miss? Somethin' the Pastor gave ye?

JANE ELIN
A package of my letters he has placed in my care. But I must go to him — with him.
[*Shrill train whistle.*

KETURAH
Nay, Miss, there's little need.

JANE ELIN
Little need! An' his Lady Mother *very* ill!

KETURAH
The Master will manage somehow.

JANE ELIN
Aye, but I can nurse her an' help him. I must go. 'Tis my place.

KETURAH
I can hear the train pullin' out now, Miss.

JANE ELIN
I can catch the next train.

KETURAH
Why did he give you the letters, Miss?

JANE ELIN

They are mine, that is — (*Looks at letters and starts*) Oh, this is not my handwritin'!

KETURAH

Whose is it?

JANE ELIN (*still to herself*)

These are *not* my letters!

KETURAH

Whose are they, Miss?

[*Comes up close to her.*

JANE ELIN

I don't know — 'tis a hand I don't know.

KETURAH

Let me see, Miss. (*Takes letters*) Aye, as I thought. 'Tis the Widow's handwritin'.

JANE ELIN

The Widow's?

KETURAH

Yiss, Mrs. Jenkin Morgan's.

JANE ELIN

You mean Mrs. Jenkin Morgan? Then —

KETURAH

Aye, letters she wrote him — before —

JANE ELIN (*very still*)

Aye, now I see — I see it all. (*She looks at Keturah*) Will you keep the letters with you, Keturah?

KETURAH (*not unkindly*)

Yiss, Miss, gladly. 'Tis better so.

JANE ELIN (*starting to speak*)

I — (*Hesitating she takes one last look at Sam-*

son Jones's study table and goes) Good-by, Keturah.

KETURAH (*going to Dutch door*)

Good-by, Miss. (*She looks out of door after Jane Elin, her head moving from side to side*) Trouble! Trouble! 'Tis as I thought. Trouble! (*Sees some one coming*) Uch, who's that? Is it him? Nay, the light hussy racin' down the street like that.

[*Deb comes running in.*

DEB

Och, Keturah, Keturah, she's gone!

KETURAH

Aye, ye passed her. Jane Elin has just gone, leavin' these behind her!

[*Holds up package of letters.*

DEB

No, no, I saw her! But 'tis my Mistress has gone!

KETURAH (*sharply*)

The Widow Dolly Morgan gone? Gone where?

DEB

She saw the Pastor runnin' past the window. She snatched her bonnet an' cloak an' was gone like the wind racin' after!

KETURAH

She was?

DEB

Aye, an' I saw her overtake him an' they ran on together.

KETURAH

They did.

DEB

They did.

[*They pause and stare at each other.*

KETURAH

'Tis certain disgrace whatever! An' he told Jane Elin his Mother was ill.

DEB

Is his Mother ill?

KETURAH

Nay — never a day of illness in her life!

DEB

Then what did he go for?

KETURAH

To get away from pledges. He gave her back the wrong package of letters.

DEB

He did?

KETURAH

Yiss. He gave her your Mistress's.

DEB (*angrily*)

My Mistress's! 'Twas your fault then.

KETURAH

Was it! Well whose fault was it that they were ever written?

DEB

Not mine, ye mean, unjust, spyin' old woman!

KETURAH (*swaying and moaning*)

Och, the disgrace of all this to a respectable old servant! (*Sinks limply into the Pastor's chair*) They will never have him in Gelligaer again!

DEB (*tossing head spitefully*)

Well, the Widow Jenkin Morgan will have him instead!

KETURAH (*rocking to and fro in her misery*)

What will happen? Where will it all end?

DEB (*cool again*)

What I am wantin' to know whatever is will the Pastor an' my Mistress get off the train at Qwyllyn to see his Lady Mother?

KETURAH

Not get off at Qwyllyn to see his Lady Mother?

DEB

I said: *Will* they? Or will they go straight through?

KETURAH (*rocking to and fro*)

Straight through? To where?

CURTAIN

STEPPIN' WESTWARD

CHARACTERS

Griffith Griffiths, Bryn Tirion's rich man.

Betty Griffiths, his wife.

Owen Williams, the proprietor of "Ye Labour in Vain Inn," also a councillor.

Robert Jones
Rhys Vaughan } ancient Town Councillors.
Hugh Wynne

Marged Owen
Marslie Powell
Ellen Roberts } old women.
Maggie Tarr

The Baker's Boy.

The Candle of the Dead, a spirit.

STEPPIN' WESTWARD

SCENE: *A village square in Bryn Tirion, North Wales. At the back can be seen a pretentious fountain, rising above to a quadrilateral clock and a church spire. To right and left small cottages and half-timbered houses are grouped. A suggestion of hills surrounding the village makes up the picture.*

It is tea time in a late afternoon of autumn, Griffith Griffiths, wiping his mouth, is just stepping out, and the Innkeeper meets him. They see each other, salute by jerking the head to the left, cross and meet in the centre. Both are somewhat portly, both with the look of shrewd men of affairs. Both are between sixty-five and seventy and still vigorous. They are clad in high Welsh beaver hats, high collars with the points rolled over, striped vests with brass buttons down the front, swallow-tail coats and somewhat tight trousers.

In the village square the people, after their tea hour, are already beginning to come out of their doors, and an increasing stir of action becomes evident.

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

A fine evenin', Owen.

OWEN WILLIAMS

Fine indeed, Griffith, but dark early these autumn days!

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Fine for sheep, fine for slate, fine for anythin' a man owns. Fine for your Inn, too, isn't it, Owen?

OWEN WILLIAMS (*anxiously*)

Aye, fine indeed, for the chill an' the dark fetch them indoors early. But the prosperity will make 'em independent, man, it will indeed. Ye'll no get your election this year.

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Ye cannot tell, man, what will happen, now can ye?

OWEN WILLIAMS

Ye're over-hopeful, Griffith, — Bryn Tirion's no wish for a Conservative on the Council.

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*smiling mysteriously and winking at the "Labour in Vain" signboard*)

We'll get your black man washed white yet, Owen. (*Takes out huge watch and consults it*) Aye, almost here!

[*Looks off beyond the village.*

OWEN WILLIAMS

What is almost here, man?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Just another trifle, man, just a trifle!

OWEN WILLIAMS

Well, Griffith, ye've done everythin' already for the village — the fountain, the bread oven, the church. I'm no seein' how there is anythin' else to be thought of!

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*inflated*)

Just a trifle, a trifle.

OWEN WILLIAMS

But they'll never put you on the Town Council until ye change your politics. As the only young an' up-to-date councillor I am tellin' ye there is no change for the better. The councillors are old an' they are set, man. They look on you an' your politics as worldly. (*Points to fountain*) Look at that fountain there! Were they grateful to ye? They were not. The Devil, man, 'twas a mistake. Robert Jones looked at it an' he said, he did (*imitating sanctimonious quavering voice of an old man and his stoop*), "What need of vain fountains on earth an' heaven drippin' wet with cee-lestial fountains?"

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*chuckling*)

Aye, I can just hear him. But change my politics I will not!

OWEN WILLIAMS (*sighing*)

I know ye mean it. But 'tis thirty years I've been helpin' to fight this battle for ye, an' 'tis not won yet.

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Aye, well, Owen, (*looking at watch again*) we'll know more in a few minutes indeed!

OWEN WILLIAMS

I dunno, ye're rich, ye could buy up the county, but ye cannot buy a single vote in this sanctified village.

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*swiftly indignant*)

Do ye think I'd try to buy a man's vote?

OWEN WILLIAMS

No-o, not just that, man, but — I dunno — just

a little string tied to the ben-ee-faction whatever!

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*chuckling*)

A string tied to the ben-ee-faction whatever!

OWEN WILLIAMS

Yiss, an' then the string snaps. It has not held once.

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Aye, well, there'll be no doubt this time whatever. It will hold! (*Stops to listen*) I think I hear it comin' now! (*Consults huge watch*) Nay, 'tis over early!

OWEN WILLIAMS (*still doubtfully*)

How can ye tell, Griffith?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Because 'twas a happy thought. (*Bursts into laughter*) Oho, ho, ho!

OWEN WILLIAMS (*grim*)

'Twill take somethin' more than happy thinkin' to win this election, man!

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*pulling watch out again*)

'Tis travellin' out of Carnarvon now.

OWEN WILLIAMS

What is it, man, a new Schoolmaster?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Nay, nay, nothin' so temporal.

OWEN WILLIAMS

A new Minister?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Nay, though that guess is better.

OWEN WILLIAMS

What is it?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Aye, well, I sent for it myself an' I'm meetin' it outside the village to bring it home whatever! There'll be no word spoke when they see that. It has cost me a hundred pounds, but I did it.

OWEN WILLIAMS

I thought ye said it was just a happy thought? What is it, Griffith? Somethin' definite?

[*Griffith leans toward the Innkeeper and whispers to him.*

OWEN WILLIAMS (*with admiration*)

A buryin' wagon! Grand! How did ye think of it, man?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*making an effort to seem modest*)

'Tis a trifle, — a little thing!

OWEN WILLIAMS

Is it! Not if you are needin' one for steppin' off! 'Tis the cleverest thought ye ever had.

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Aye.

OWEN WILLIAMS

Is it like a cart?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Nay, not exactly a cart, but somethin' new an' smart, man. 'Tis no exactly a trap, either, but ye might call it a trap. They're just bein' seen in London an' Liverpool for the first time.

OWEN WILLIAMS

Man, ye're clever. Has it no name?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Aye, 'tis called a hearse.

OWEN WILLIAMS

A hearse! Well, 'tis an odd word indeed!

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Aye, they were invented for royalty whatever. (*Swells out his chest*)

OWEN WILLIAMS

Royalty, man, think of that!

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Aye, I did. They are beginnin' to use them for the gentry.

OWEN WILLIAMS

'Twill be the makin" of Byron Tirion socially.

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Yiss, 'twill.

OWEN WILLIAMS

How did ye think of it, Griffiths?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Well, the village hadn't any whatever, — just the old cart that was painted red.

OWEN WILLIAMS

'Twill be a great an' welcome surprise, man, indeed it will.

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Yiss, I'm thinkin' 'twill be.

OWEN WILLIAMS (*with pride*)

The folks over to C'n'rvon won't be as smart as we.

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

That's true, — not so smart by half!

OWEN WILLIAMS

Ye're a thoughtful man, Griffiths. Ye've done about everythin" could be done for this village. Except ye're a Conservative, there isn't a man

better thought of than ye. They ought to put ye on the Council this night at the meetin', but as I said, they're old an' set in their ways an' their politics. Eighty is no ripe age for changin' ideas, — especially when there is not much to change. An' if Robert Jones thought the — what did ye call it?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Hearse, man. That's the new name for it.

OWEN WILLIAMS

That's it! If he thought the hearse worldly, 'twould settle it an' ye'd never be appointed! I dunno, I dunno.

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Well, man, we'll see!

OWEN WILLIAMS

Are ye givin' it outright as ye did the fountain an' the oven an' the organ?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

No exactly that way this time. 'Tis a ben-ee-faction I'm dispensin' whatever.

OWEN WILLIAMS (*looking at him with admiration*)

A ben—ee—faction you are dispensin' whatever!

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*bursting into sudden roars of laughter*) Oho, ho, ho!

[*Owen Williams, clasping his rotund stomach, also goes off into shouts of mirth. They rock backwards and forwards towards each other and away from each other until Griffith Griffiths begins to wipe his eyes with a handkerchief as big as a pillow slip and to get control of himself.*

OWEN WILLIAMS

There'll be no doubt this time, an' every old granny an' totterin' councillor in the town a-thankin' ye.

[*Mrs. Griffiths hears the loud laughter and opens the door to see who is laughing. She discovers Griffith Griffiths and the Innkeeper, studies them suspiciously, and calls.*

BETTY GRIFFITHS

Father, Father!

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Aye, Mother, in a minute!

[*They lower their voices and continue talking.*

BETTY GRIFFITHS

Father, I'm wantin' ye!

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Aye, Mother, I am on the way now to ye whatever!

[*He does not move; they resume their talking and chuckling again.*

BETTY GRIFFITHS

Aye, ye are comin' so fast I cannot see which way ye are movin'! (*She hesitates a moment and then limps forward, a white cap on her head, a kerchief about her shoulders, a cane in her hand. When she reaches his side*) Father!

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*starting*)

Aye!

BETTY GRIFFITHS

Good evenin', Owen Williams.

OWEN WILLIAMS

Good evenin', mum.

BETTY GRIFFITHS

Father?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS
Well, Mother?

BETTY GRIFFITHS
Is it a joke?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS
No-o, a joke, yiss, aye—no-o, 'tis not. Well is it, Owen?

OWEN WILLIAMS
A joke, Mrs. Griffiths? I dunno. (*Scratches head*)

BETTY GRIFFITHS
Father, ye're plottin' somethin'. 'Tis more of that wicked, dee-moralizin' game of politics whatever!

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS
Nay, nay, Mother, no politics this time. 'Tis a ben—ee—faction we are discussin'!

BETTY GRIFFITHS
What are ye thinkin' of doin' now?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*with conviction*)
I've been a-thinkin', Mother.

BETTY GRIFFITHS (*with censure in her voice and on her face*)
An' is it thinkin' sets ye an' Owen Williams laughin' so all Bryn Tirion'll know ye're plottin' again?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*uneasily*)
Aye, well, I'm thinkin' now, Mother, I'm thinkin' of steppin' westward a bit!

BETTY GRIFFITHS
Westward! An' what would be ye goin' that direction for?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

I'm thinkin', Mother, of meetin' somethin'!

BETTY GRIFFITHS

Thinkin' of meetin' somethin'?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Aye, meetin' somethin' an' fetchin' it home.

BETTY GRIFFITHS

Is it moral whatever?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Yiss, no — that is, it has passed beyond what is or isn't moral whatever.

BETTY GRIFFITHS (*suspiciously*)

Well, if 'tis that housekeeper to help me ye have been discussin', ye can stop here an' let her come on steppin' eastward alone. I'll no have ye seen prancin' into town with a woman whatever an' creatin' scandal! An' if her reputation has passed beyond, as ye say it has, she can pass on!

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Aye, but, Mother, 'tis not a woman whatever!

BETTY GRIFFITHS

Is it sheep?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*embarrassed and impatient*)

No, no exactly sheep, Mother!

BETTY GRIFFITHS

Is it that load of slate to take the place of the thatch?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

No exactly slate, no exactly a joke, no exactly anythin'!

BETTY GRIFFITHS (*undaunted*)

Am I goin' with ye, Father, to meet it?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

No, Mother, I'll step westward an' back in two shakes of a lamb's tail.

BETTY GRIFFITHS (*looking him over coolly*)

Aye, well, at your age two shakes will have to be slow! (*To Owen Williams*) Are ye goin', Owen Williams?

OWEN WILLIAMS (*with alacrity*)

No indeed, mum, I cannot leave my Inn, but, ye see —

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*interposing hastily*)

Mother, I'm — I'm a-goin' just —

BETTY GRIFFITHS

Just for what?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

I'm a-goin' for the walk!

BETTY GRIFFITHS (*sniffing*)

For the walk!

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*winking at Owen Williams*)

I'll be steppin' as far as the haberdasher's. Shall I bring ye a cap, mam?

BETTY GRIFFITHS (*coolly*)

I'm no wantin' anythin'. (*The Baker's cart, drawn by a fat old dog, rumbles in and stops before Betty Griffiths' door. The Baker's Boy walks along the square ringing a bell to announce the arrival of the bread cart*) Dear, there's the Baker's Boy here! Well, good evenin', Owen Williams.

OWEN WILLIAMS

Good evenin', mum. Let me help ye back to your own steps.

BETTY GRIFFITHS

I'm no needin' any help whatever.

[*Betty Griffiths limps back to her own steps and stands there receiving the bread from the cart. Betty goes into the house with her bread and without another glance for her husband.*

OWEN WILLIAMS

Your wife doesn't know, man?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

No, a woman worries when she's to keep a secret whatever.

OWEN WILLIAMS

Yiss, yiss, I dunno but ye're right; an' more 's the pity. (*Maggie Tarr and Ellen Roberts come in side by side, bent double under bundles of faggots*) There's Maggie Tarr an' Ellen Roberts.

[*Old, tottering, still gallant, they stumble through the square.*

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Aye, 'twill be a blessin' to such as they, — somethin' to live for.

BETTY GRIFFITHS (*coming out and forward*)

Father, Father!

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Aye, Mother, comin', I'm comin'. Well, good evenin', Owen.

[*For an instant their heads are together as they whisper.*

OWEN WILLIAMS (*aloud*)

Shall ye be bringin' it with ye?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Aye, man, in less than half an' hour! (*Looks at*

watch again) Aye, 'tis almost here, an' I must go.

OWEN WILLIAMS

Well, good evenin'!

[*Owen can be seen going from group to group telling each that Griffith Griffiths is about to make another benefaction. In the gestures of the old women excitement becomes visible.*

BETTY GRIFFITHS

If ye 're a-goin', Father, ye've no time to lose, whatever.

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Aye, Mother, in a moment.

BETTY GRIFFITHS

I've no great opinion of anythin' ye are goin' to do.

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*losing his good nature a bit*)

Do ye *know* what I am goin' to do whatever?

[*Leaves her and goes into house.*

BETTY GRIFFITHS (*calling after him*)

Folks that go steppin' westward sometimes go on the downfall!

[*The news that Griffith Griffiths is making another benefaction reaches a group nearest Betty. Marged Owen breaks away from the group and goes up to Betty Griffiths.*

MARGED OWEN (*reaching Betty Griffiths and speaking in a high, feeble voice*)

I hear 'tis another ben-ee-faction an' Griffith Griffiths is goin' to Liverpool.

BETTY GRIFFITHS

He 's steppin' westward, — no to Liverpool.

MARGED OWEN (*hand to ear*)
School?

BETTY GRIFFITHS
Nay, *not* to Liverpool.

MARGED OWEN (*smiling and pleased*)
Yiss, yiss, to Liverpool, — he is goin' to Liverpool as I thought.

BETTY GRIFFITHS
Dear people! (*Louder*) I — said — Griffiths — was — steppin' — westward whatever.

MARGED OWEN
Oh-h, steppin' westward!

BETTY GRIFFITHS
Yiss.

MARGED OWEN
Steppin' westward! What for?

BETTY GRIFFITHS
I did not say.

MARGED OWEN
But he's goin'?

BETTY GRIFFITHS
Yiss, he is.

MARGED OWEN
Do ye think he could trouble with an old woman's cap?

BETTY GRIFFITHS
He 's no goin' to Liverpool, I said.

MARGED OWEN
I'm wantin' a new cap to be buried in. A smart cap from Liverpool, dear people! 'twould be grand, an' —

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*coming out briskly*)
What's that, Granny?

MARGED OWEN
Heh?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*shouting*)
Is it somethin' ye 're wantin'?

MARGED OWEN
I was askin' your wife did she think ye could be bothered buyin' a new cap whatever for an old woman to be buried in?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*making a note of it*)
Aye, Granny, a new cap to be buried in — yiss, indeed. I'll gladly get it for ye *when* I go to Liverpool.

MARGED OWEN
Are ye on the way now, young man?

BETTY GRIFFITHS
I said he was no goin' to Liverpool — whatever.

MARGED OWEN (*hand to ear*) . . .
I heard ye. That's what I thought, — to Liverpool. Ye have no need to shout so, Betty Griffiths, for I am hearin' better every day. 'Tis this wind blowin' confused me.

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS
Well, I must be off now!

[*Old women are closing up on him now, and with difficulty he works his way out.*

MARSLIE POWELL (*getting his ear and his coat lapel*)
I hear ye 're goin' to Liverpool, Griffith Griffiths.

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS
No to Liverpool, Granny. Just steppin' westward for a moment.

MARSLIE POWELL

Lad, could ye be doin' an errand for an old woman?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*looking anxious as he sees the group thickening*)

Yiss, yiss, gladly, gladly, Granny, gladly when I go.

MARSLIE POWELL (*hanging hard to the receding coat lapel*)

That 's what I thought. Well, I was sayin' to Ellen Roberts when Marged Roberts told her an' told me ye was goin' to Liverpool whatever, I was sayin' to Ellen Roberts, 'tis the last chance maybe I'd have to get that linen I'm wishin' to be put away in. Could ye —

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*impatiently*)

Yiss, yiss, Granny, *when* I go to Liverpool.

OLD WOMEN

Liverpool must be a grand place whatever!

MARSLIE POWELL

Could ye purchase five yards?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

How much?

MARSLIE POWELL

I'm thinkin' five yards, but —

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*making a note of it*)

Yiss, five, when I go to Liverpool.

MARSLIE POWELL

Mind, lad, 'tis fine. Dear, dear, to think —

[*Ellen Roberts and Maggie Tarr hobble up and set down their bundles of faggots. Ellen grasps*

Griffith Griffiths by the coat, and Maggie Tarr seizes him by the arm, each old woman shouts orders at him as he tries to escape. Whatever Ellen Roberts and Maggie Tarr do, they "play" together like two cracked old fiddles still in unison. At a secure distance, Owen Williams is slapping his knee and chuckling. On her steps Betty Griffiths stands, a disapproving figure watching her husband's attempts to escape.

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*shouting*)

Yiss, Granny, I've made a note of it! Aye, but I'm no goin' to Liverpool today!

MAGGIE TARR

Are ye never goin' to Liverpool?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Dear people, yiss, I said I was no goin' to Liverpool today but some day.

ELLEN ROBERTS (*shrieking in cracked old voice*)

Stockin's, I'm wantin' stockin's from Liverpool!

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Yiss, yiss, Granny, I'll bring ye each somethin' — I will whatever, *when* I go. Good-by now, I must be steppin' westward.

[*He fairly runs from them, the old women hobbling after. When they realize that he is out of their reach, they stop and gaze longingly after him. Owen Williams comes towards the group of disappointed old women and shouts at Maggie Tarr.*

OWEN WILLIAMS

Aye, Granny, he's gone now! Did ye pull his arm out?

MAGGIE TARR

Where's he gone to?

ELLEN ROBERTS (*gazing after him*)

'Tis a wicked speed for a man to go at, — like the wind that's blowin'.

MARSLIE POWELL

He 's no settled down yet. He was always a reckless lad!

MAGGIE TARR (*acidly*)

Yiss, wild in his ways. A bundle of faggots would keep his feet to the ground!

OWEN WILLIAMS

Tut! Tut! Maggie Tarr, such speech is not gratitude at all whatever, for all he has done for ye! An' when he's on the way this minute to get somethin' for every last Granny of you.

MARSLIE POWELL

For us?

MAGGIE TARR

For me?

MARGED OWEN

For me?

OWEN WILLIAMS (*expanding*)

For each an' all of you!

MAGGIE TARR

Did ye say a gift?

OWEN WILLIAMS

Yiss, 'tis, an' no 'tisn't. 'Tis a ben — ee — faction he will be dispensin' whatever.

MARSLIE POWELL

A what?

OWEN WILLIAMS

A ben — ee — fac-tion.

MARSLIE POWELL

Ye've no need to screech so. 'Twas just that at first I did no catch the name of whose son Ben it was. 'Tis this wind moanin'!

ELLEN ROBERTS (*to Betty Griffiths*)

Then Griffiths is steppin' westward?

BETTY GRIFFITHS

Yiss, he is.

MAGGIE TARR

He'll be back tonight?

BETTY GRIFFITHS

Yiss, he will.

[*The clock on the village fountain strikes six. For the time they are listening to the strokes, the square is silent. As the clock finishes the stroke of six, the ancient Town Councillors file one after another across the village square in the direction of the Council Room. Owen Williams falls in meekly behind. Each Councillor has his chin solemnly in the air and his hands solemnly folded in front of him. Not a word is said till they have passed. In a line the old women watch the old men file past.*

BETTY GRIFFITHS (*full of admiration and a little envy.*)

Dear people, they do look grand!

[*Then all the old women begin to hobble indoors, calling good-night to one another in high cracked voices.*

MARGED OWEN (*readjusting her shawl*)
I'll be slippin' indoors now.
[*All go indoors except the two old faggot women and Betty Griffiths.*

BETTY GRIFFITHS
'Tis dark early these days.

ELLEN ROBERTS
Yiss, an' are ye afraid of the Candle of the Dead flappin' its light in your eyes?

MAGGIE TARR
Ye said he was returnin' tonight?

BETTY GRIFFITHS
I said so.

ELLEN ROBERTS
Rhys Vaughan says he's no taken the trip to Liverpool for a year, is it true?

BETTY GRIFFITHS
Aye, a year ago.

MAGGIE TARR (*pulling her faggots higher on her back and peering up into Betty Griffiths' face*)
Rhys Vaughan says he's goin' for new machinery come from Ameriky. Is he so?

BETTY GRIFFITHS
'Tis autumn, — no the time when a man buys new machinery.

ELLEN ROBERTS
Dear me, 'tis true. . . . (*Hesitates, goes on slowly*) Do ye know what it is?

BETTY GRIFFITHS
At my age, one is no tellin' all she knows.

MAGGIE TARR

Ye say Griffiths is comin' back tonight? Is he bringin' another fountain with him?

BETTY GRIFFITHS

He's havin' the extra fountain sent after him! (*Opening her house door and starting to enter*)

ELLEN ROBERTS

Ye didn't say, mum, what Griffiths was steppin' westward for, did ye?

BETTY GRIFFITHS

No, I did not.

MAGGIE TARR (*reflectively, stooping under her faggots*)

The election 's this evenin', I'm thinkin'.

BETTY GRIFFITHS (*tartly*)

Is it so?

ELLEN ROBERTS

Well, good-night, mum.

BETTY GRIFFITHS (*closing the door*)

Good-night to you both!

[*The old women watch her an instant, look at each other and then patiently hobble off and disappear. It is dark now, the square is empty and silent except for the closing of doors and windows and the dimming of one light after another. From the church at the back of the square chimes ring. Owls begin to hoot and a dog to bark. A tall, beautiful figure, the Candle of the Dead appears clad in white and holding a torch in her hand. She goes from cottage to cottage, lifting up the candle and evidently seeking for something. She pauses a long time in front of some of the cot-*

tages, making signs and sighing in a way that sounds like the moaning of the wind. Then the Candle of the Dead crosses to other cottages, and the same signs are made, the same sighs given.

In the midst of it all there is heard a loud bumpety-thumpety-bump coming nearer and nearer, and the Candle of the Dead disappears.

Now is seen the usual commotion caused by an unusual noise; lights are lit, windows are opened, doors are opened and closed, neighbors greet one another; Owen Williams comes out, a huge ancient lantern in his hand.

The old women, carrying quaint candle lanterns, gather together, and shout questions at one another.

MAGGIE TARR

Is it a fire?

MARGED OWEN

I dunno, is it? Did ye see the light?

MARSLIE POWELL

Ow! Ow! see that burnin' light over there!

ELLEN ROBERTS

Did ye see the Candle of the Dead flappin' about the square?

MAGGIE TARR (*shivering*)

Maybe the Candle of the Dead lookin' for one of us!

OWEN WILLIAMS

Nay, nay, Granny, 'twas nothin' at all — nothin' at all!

MARSLIE POWELL

'Tis a burnin' fire over there!

ELLEN ROBERTS

Aye, there! 'Tis the moon gettin' up, an' peerin' through the faggots Maggie Tarr an' I will be gettin' some day.

[*Both cackle with mirth. Again loud bumps.*

MARSLIE POWELL (*frightened*)

What's that we're hearin'?

[*Thumpety-bumpety-bump comes louder and louder.*

OWEN WILLIAMS

I will just go see what is makin' all that noise!

[*Rubs his hands and starts off gleefully.*

MARGED OWEN

I hear nothin', whatever! (*Sniffing*) But what is that I smell?

MAGGIE TARR

Nothin' either.

MARSLIE POWELL

Do ye suppose Owen thinks 'tis Griffith Griffiths comin' over the cobbles into town?

MAGGIE TARR

Makin' all that noise? What would he be bringin'?

MARGED OWEN

Has he come?

MARSLIE POWELL

An' the man just gone an' Liverpool the distance it is! Uch, 'twill be hours before *he* comes.

ELLEN ROBERTS

Griffiths is comin'!

MARGED OWEN

Who's comin'?

[*At this moment a loud noise is heard and a shout that Griffith Griffiths is coming.*

OLD WOMEN

He's comin'! He's comin'!

[*Amidst the shouts that Griffiths is coming, the heavy rolling of wheels and the stamping of horses — all rush to get a sight of Griffith Griffiths.*

As he comes into view of the people, but not into or within view of the square, there is an awestruck silence, and long "ahs" and "ohs!" and "ochs!" and "dear people!" etc.

Almost immediately Griffiths, smiling victoriously, comes into the square, Owen Williams behind him. The old women fairly cling to his coat and sleeves as he comes forward. Betty Griffiths comes out, a huge lantern in her hand, and stands waiting for him.

MARGED OWEN

An' I thought 'twould be just an old pulpit for the chapel.

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*from the neighborhood of his own doorstep, where he stands beside his wife*)

A pulpit? Well, indeed! (*With a look for the Council Chamber windows and rubbing his hands*) Is that a light in the Council Chamber, Owen?

OWEN WILLIAMS

Aye, 'tis their lanterns set in a row in the window sill. They are waitin' to hear from me about the ben-ee-faction.

MARSLIE POWELL (*softly*)

If the Lord had a-asked me what I wanted most,

He couldn't have done better than that smart new buryin' wagon whatever. Let me look at your face, young man.

[*Holds her candle lantern under Griffiths' nose.*

ELLEN ROBERTS

'Tis the Lord's gift, aye, the Lord's gift meant specially for me!

MAGGIE TARR (*angrily*)

Nay, for me. To think I'd live to drive in a real live smart trap like that.

OWEN WILLIAMS

What was that ye called it, Griffiths?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

Hearse, — that's the new name for it. Yiss, yiss, 'tis somethin' new, somethin' smart!

ELLEN ROBERTS

'Twill be pretty an' tasty with mournin', now won't it?

OLD WOMEN

Yiss, yiss.

OWEN WILLIAMS

The Councillors will be wantin' the news, man.

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*with a benevolent gesture*)

Aye, aye, man, go in. Tell them it has come.

OWEN WILLIAMS

Yiss, man. An' I'll be back soon.

[*He goes.*

MAGGIE TARR (*calling after*)

Tell them there is one old woman will no be buried from the tail of an old red cart, with its splinters stabbin' her worse than faggots.

ELLEN ROBERTS

Aye, tell them Ellen Roberts is hopin' to die an' die grand.

MAGGIE TARR (*ironically*)

Yiss, yiss, Ellen Roberts, to die as grand as we lived, — with bundles of faggots on our backs! Aye, well.

ELLEN ROBERTS

I've a grand dress 'll no be too hot in like that one Maggie will be laid away in.

MAGGIE TARR

But what if the weather is cold?

ELLEN ROBERTS (*philosophically*)

Aye, well, there'll no be a faggot bendin' either of us double.

MAGGIE TARR

Nay, if there's faggots there, we'll be dancin' to keep our feet cool.

[*The old women's heads come together; they cackle and giggle like so many young girls.*

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*to Betty Griffiths*)

Are the lights in the Council Chamber movin', Mother?

BETTY GRIFFITHS

I saw nothin'.

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

The Chamber is dark now.

[*At this moment, the Councillors, Owen Williams leading, solemnly file out, single file, from the Chamber, each a big lantern in hand, and solemnly cross the square on their way to inspect the new hearse.*

MARSLIE POWELL
The Councillors are out.

ELLEN ROBERTS
They are no stoppin' here.

MAGGIE TARR
They're no sayin' a word whatever!

ELLEN ROBERTS
They are on the way out to see the new buryin' wagon whatever!

BETTY GRIFFITHS (*proudly*)
They will find out nothin' new.

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS
Nay, Mother, nay, the wagon is smart an' new.

BETTY GRIFFITHS (*to old women*)
I'm no meanin' that: I was thinkin' Griffiths has thought of everythin' a man could think of as a benefit to the village.

ELLEN ROBERTS (*shrilly, holding her lantern up to his face and peering at him*)
If I make it first, before Maggie Tarr, ye'll have it put on the stone 'twas I, not her, was buried first from the new buryin' cart? Yiss?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*both pleased and pouring oil on the waters*)
Aye, aye, maybe ye will both be steppin' off together! 'Twould be a wonderful opportunity at demonstration whatever!

MARGED OWEN (*putting her hand to ear*)
At what?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*shouting*)
Demonstration — puttin' the new cart through its paces.

MAGGIE TARR (*pleased at idea even if shared*)
Yiss, an' this night we were the first to see the Candle of the Dead flappin' about the square.

ELLEN ROBERTS
Aye, we saw it! First we thought it was a light in the church, for it looked large as a lamp of flame an' it was over-early for spirits to be lively. Then we saw it movin' an' comin' toward the faggots we were stackin'.

MAGGIE TARR
Aye, it passed over our faggots like a light mist.

ELLEN ROBERTS
An' the nearer it came, the smaller grew the flame till it was no bigger than a thimble.

MARSLIE POWELL
Were ye frightened?

MAGGIE TARR (*answering before Ellen Roberts can*)
I was. I just let it pass close by me an' 'twas a woman carryin' a light.

ELLEN ROBERTS
What a lie! She passed nearer me. An' —

MAGGIE TARR (*wagging her head*)
I saw it first, an' when she went over to the graveyard there wasn't any more thickness to her than to a candle flame. Ye could thrust your finger straight through her.

MARGED OWEN (*appraisingly*)
Ye cannot tell whether it'll be Ellen Roberts or Maggie Tarr dyin' first, now can ye?

ELLEN ROBERTS (*clamoring to Griffiths*)
Ye'll be puttin' on my stone I was first to use it?

MAGGIE TARR (*clamoring*)

Nay, Griffiths, ye'll be puttin' on the stone 'twas I first used the wagon?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*delighted and to both*)

Yiss, yiss, either way! Either way! I'll bear the expense gladly. But I'm hopin' 'twill be together whatever!

BETTY GRIFFITHS

Father, they're comin' back.

[*The Councillors solemnly file in, this time Owen Williams the last of the line.*

ROBERT JONES (*quavering old voice*)

Griffith Griffiths, the wagon is like nothin' we have ever seen on this sinful earth whatever. Ye have done a grand thing for the village.

RHYS VAUGHAN

We have seen it an' 'tis grand beyond expectation! Ye have put us under an obligation we find it hard to discharge. Not only we must be in your debt, but generations to come will also be.

HUGH WYNNE

Well, young man, no ben-ee-faction could exceed this smart wagon. From now on the dead will no care whether ye are a Conservative or a Radical.

ROBERT JONES

Young man, we have no altered our minds about havin' a Conservative in the Council, an' we do care, yet 'tis godly for the livin' to discharge the debt of gratitude for the dead.

OWEN WILLIAMS (*stepping out from line*)

Griffith Griffiths, I am empowered to say that ye have been elected to the Council of Bryn Tirion.

[*The old women cackle and flock about Griffiths. Betty smiles proudly, the Councillors shake hands with Griffiths and file away, all except Owen Williams. He and Griffiths are left standing together, their hands over their stomachs, their finger tips together, their eyes looking straight ahead.*

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS (*looking neither to right nor to left and his expression unchanging*)

Did the string hold?

OWEN WILLIAMS (*starting, and then replacing his fingertips*)

What's that?

GRIFFITH GRIFFITHS

I said, "Did the string hold?"

CURTAIN

LOOK TO THE END

CHARACTERS

Silvan Rhys, an old man.
Nance Rhys, his old wife.
Shoni the Coach, their son.
Gladys Owen, a kindly neighbor.
Megan Thomas, the usual neighbor.
Morto Griffith, the same kind.

LOOK TO THE END

PLACE: *Rhyd Ddu, among the North Welsh hills.*

SCENE: *A flagstoned areaway outside an overhanging thatched eave. Beneath the thatch two casement windows which open outward. In the areaway are a bench with churn on it, a big shining milk can and a stool before the churn. On the bench beside the churn are an earthenware pitcher, a large bowl, a wooden box of salt, a butter paddle, etc. Inside the window is a big empty chair with an old cape thrown over it.*

Silvan, old and white-haired, has arched eyebrows, delicate features, and a whimsical sprightly look. He is wearing a loose striped shirt with a wing collar and old silver-gray trousers.

Nance is old, white-haired, plump, clean. Her features are short and firm; if they suggest anything aggressive, it is pugnacity. She wears a full short skirt, a full apron over that, a kerchief around the shoulders of a tight bodice, and a white cap on her silver hair.

Nance is helping Silvan to the chair. He has his arm about her neck. She lets him down gently into the chair and places cape about his shoulders.

NANCE

There, lad, now ye will be able to see me while I churn.

SILVAN

Aye, I'm a nuisance whatever!

NANCE

Ye are no to say that. I am strong to churn, lad dear, but I'd be weak to have to do without you!

SILVAN (*earnestly*)

Aye, mam, but ye must no forget that you an' I have come to the edge that is sharp as the ridge of our own roof.

NANCE

Silvan, ye are no to be talkin' that way!

SILVAN

We must be partin' soon. But when I am gone, there will be our Shoni.

NANCE

Aye, but I cannot bear it.

SILVAN

Mam, 'tis best we should be thinkin' about it together, — while we can.

NANCE (*placing his cape about him*)

Dad dear, be still!

SILVAN

Aye, I must be soon. But, dearie, ye are to remember that if we have had sorrow, we have had these hills, too, an' the solemn starlight an' the beautiful dawn an' manifold song from sunrise to sunset, — an' we have had it all together, — you an' Shoni an' I.

NANCE (*standing behind him and wiping her eyes as she tries to speak steadily*)

Lad, dear, there is much time still.

SILVAN

Nay, the physician said 'twas but a little while an' I am no wantin' to leave ye unprepared. Ye are to remember that 'tis only a step. I'm thinkin' there will be hills an' mountain winds an' valleys there, too.

NANCE

Oh, dad dear, don't!

[*She rests her cheek on the top of his head and he reaches up his trembling hand to her shoulder.*

SILVAN

Aye, dearie, but we have all known love here an' I'm thinkin' we'll know love there, too. Think how good Shoni has been to us.

NANCE

Ye have been good to him.

SILVAN

The lad is worth it: clear an' fresh like the mountain stream, proud like a good girl; innocent as ye have always been, mam.

NANCE

Lad, lad! He's wonderful, — as you were, as you are!

SILVAN

Ye're no to worry about anythin'!

NANCE

Aye, Silvan, but if I am worryin' about —

SILVAN

About what?

NANCE

Aye, well, 'tis no matter!

[*Stoops and kisses his head and goes out to churn.*

SILVAN (*leaning forward and speaking out the window*)
What's troublin' you, mam?

NANCE (*busying herself with churn*)
Nothin', nothin' at all whatever! (*Rinsing out churn with cold water*) There, that's cool and clean.

SILVAN
Yiss, but 'tis somethin'. I can see it is.

NANCE
Lad, have ye thought of the Bible verses ye are goin' to say?

SILVAN
Well indeed, that again!
[*Laughs.*

NANCE (*a little hurt*)
Yiss, that again!

SILVAN
Indeed, ye are persistent, mam. 'Tisn't everybody dies repeatin' Bible verses.

NANCE (*pouring cream into churn*)
That cream is almost solid. . . . (*Looking up at him*) They do when they can whatever. Even Harry James said the verse they printed on his card.

SILVAN (*chuckling*)
He must have done it in between swearin' an' drinkin'!

NANCE
Dad, dear, don't! For all your teasin' an' your fun, ye are so good, dad dear, an' — an' —
[*Her voice breaks.*

SILVAN

Tut, mam, ye're just wantin' to spoil me, a-makin' out I'm the best man in Rhyd Ddu.

NANCE

An' so ye are, lad dear.

SILVAN

Now, when I am goin', ye are wantin' me to have more honor among the neighbors nor anyone else. Isn't that it?

NANCE

Yiss.

[*Begins to churn. Stops and looks in churn.*

SILVAN

An' ye're wishin' me to promise to say some text, mam?

NANCE (*brushing her eyes with her sleeve and nodding her head*)

Yiss.

SILVAN

What text?

NANCE (*starting up at the sound of distant coughing*)

Uch, there comes that Megan Thomas! (*Coughing is heard*)

'Tis Megan's hard cough.

SILVAN

'Tis not unlike the rest of her.

NANCE

She made you ill the last time she was here.

SILVAN

Aye, she's bitter medicine for a young man like

me who is lovin' the pretty girls the best whatever.

[*Coughing again.*

NANCE (*starting to close windows*)

Tut!

SILVAN

Aye, mam, but is not that why I'm lovin' you the best of all!

NANCE (*pleased, but closing windows firmly*)

I'll open them as soon as she's gone, you foolish lad.

SILVAN

Shall I sing her a song?

NANCE

Tut! Ye are no to sing any of those foolish songs or make any noise whatever!

[*Nance starts to churn rapidly. The coughing is heard coming nearer and nearer, — a hard, rasping sound. Nance's back is turned to the direction from which Megan Thomas is coming. Megan Thomas comes within sight of the churn and Nance, and thinks her coughing has not been heard. Sniffing and peering into everything, she steals towards Nance and the churn.*

Megan Thomas wears a high beaver, a full short skirt of heavy striped material, a skimpy bodice, a kerchief about her shoulders. Her face is sharp, red-nosed, hard-eyed. She knits furiously as she tiptoes towards Nance, and she almost never stops knitting. She steals up to within a foot or two of Nance and speaks triumphantly.

MEGAN THOMAS

Good mornin', Mrs. Rhys!

NANCE (*pretending to start*)
Uch, who's that!

MEGAN THOMAS
'Tis me, Mrs. Thomas. Ye didn't hear me, did ye?

NANCE
I was listenin' to the slap of the paddle in the cream whatever.

MEGAN THOMAS
How is Mr. Rhys?

NANCE
He is no so well this mornin'. Indeed, mornin' is always a ba-ad time for him whatever.

[*From within comes a sudden burst of merry song and Silvan's voice singing in sweet but cracked notes:*

"Thou dear little Gwen, kindest maiden of all,
With cheeks fair and ruddy, and teeth white and small,
With thy blue sparkling eyes, and thy eyebrows so bright,
Ah, how I would love thee, sweet girl, if I might!"

MEGAN THOMAS (*sarcastically*)
Aye, he sounds ill, he does!

NANCE (*taking off lid of churn and peering in*)
He is cheerin' himself whatever. He's always merry when he's worse.

MEGAN THOMAS
Is he!

NANCE

Yiss, 'tis comin', — I can see the butter.

MEGAN THOMAS

Did ye say he was no better?

NANCE

I said I could see the butter. But he is no better.

MEGAN THOMAS

Where is Shoni the Coach?

NANCE

On his route, drivin'!

MEGAN THOMAS

Aye, an ungodly life dashin' to an' fro crackin' his whip on the ungodly highway an' wearin' those smart clothes.

NANCE

They are the official clothes whatever!

MEGAN THOMAS

Are they? Well, 'tis the rig of the Devil.

NANCE

My son is a good lad.

MEGAN THOMAS (*nastily*)

Like son like father! (*Nance continues busy*) Did ye say that was your man singin'?

NANCE

I did.

MEGAN THOMAS

He also could spend his time better, I'm thinkin'.

NANCE (*churning furiously*)

Dear, dear, this butter turns heavily.

MEGAN THOMAS

'Tis a pity ye did not attend Harry James's funeral. 'Twas grand.

NANCE (*taking lid off again*)

Aye, was it!

MEGAN THOMAS

Yiss, they had beautiful black candles with Scripture words written on them.

[*From behind the windows comes one line sung clearly:*

"Ah, how I would love thee, sweet girl, if I might."

[*Megan Thomas glowers at the windows, knits still more furiously, and goes on as if she knew she could wound with her words.*

He's no any cause for singin', I'm thinkin'. . . . Harry James's funeral was an honor to Rhyd Ddu! An' such loaves as they handed over the bier to that hungry Betsan! An' the biggest cheese in the parish with a whole guinea stuck in it! An' at every crossin' they rung the bell an' we knelt down to pray for Harry James. Have ye ever heard of anythin' grander whatever?

NANCE

'Tis seldom Rhyd Ddu sees black candles with Scripture words on 'em. (*Lifting the paddle out of the churn and setting it in a dish of cold water*) The butter is ready to wash.

[*Draws large earthen bowl towards her.*

MEGAN THOMAS

Pooh! the candles, they was nothin' to the cards Mrs. James had had printed for him — nothin'.

NANCE

I'll draw off the buttermilk. Shoni will come run-

nin' home to ask about his father an' wantin' his glass of buttermilk. (*Reaches to take out plug*)

MEGAN THOMAS (*Piqued by Nance's seeming indifference, she extends card*)

Here's my card. It has his last words printed on it.

[*Nance's hand stops short of the plug and she looks eagerly towards the card, a large, stiff, white cardboard affair, heavily edged with black and ornately printed. She shoves the plug back in.*

Scripture words, too. 'Tis sanctifyin' how many people in Rhyd Ddu die repeatin' the words of Scripture.

NANCE (*wiping her hands on her apron and reaching out for the card*)

What was they, Mrs. Thomas?

MEGAN THOMAS (*handing it to her*)

Here 'tis! Ye can see for yourself.

NANCE (*her hand trembles as she takes the card*)

Dear people, 'tis grand! (*She opens it and turns it about admiringly*) What a wide border of black on the outside! An' on the inside what a grand border of silver an' black. Dear, dear, how beautiful!

MEGAN THOMAS

Read the words to yourself, Mrs. Rhys.

NANCE

I've no spectacles here. Can I keep the card for Silvan to read to me?

MEGAN THOMAS (*reaching out her hand for it*)

Nay, I'm havin' it framed. I will myself read

the words Harry James said: "For I am not come to call the righteous: but sinners to repentance."

NANCE (*solemnly*)

Fittin' words for him to be sayin' at the end.

MEGAN THOMAS

Yiss, 'tis a pity some cannot begin earlier to say words like that! I have twenty-five on my walls now, — each in its own frame whatever an' not one of the frames cost less than a shillin'!

NANCE (*respectfully*)

Yiss, yiss, 'tis grand the collection you have made.

MEGAN THOMAS

An' every one of those cards a man, woman, or child that died in Rhyd Ddu.

NANCE

Dear, dear!

MEGAN THOMAS

Aye, Rhyd Ddu is a grand place for dyin' whatever! There was John Jenkins (*beginning to tap off each one with her knitting needle on Nance's shoulder*), an' John Pryse, little Emlyn Jones the greatest saint of all though only five years of age, Evan Evans, Daniel Evans, Morfydd, the wife of Morgan, William Williams, Robert Prichard, Rees Prichard, Mrs. Walters the Candle, Winifreda Walters the light hussy, Nest Blackwell — an' a nest of wickedness she was too — Glan Cawrdaf — how many is that?

NANCE (*looking more and more frightened*)

Thirteen, Mrs. Thomas.

MEGAN THOMAS

Yiss, well, twelve more. Harry James makes the twenty-sixth, an' Mr. Rhys —

NANCE (*shrinking away*)

Must you go on, Mrs. Thomas? You have told me the list before.

MEGAN THOMAS

Well indeed, 'tis a safe way to die!

[*From within comes a burst of song:* "Smile again, lovely Jane!"

Mrs. Thomas repockets the card indignantly.

NANCE (*apologetically*)

He is singin' for good cheer.

MEGAN THOMAS (*snappily*)

A light song for a heavy end, I'm thinkin'. An' your son on the road tootin' a hell horn! Good day, Mrs. Rhys. Tell your man I called to ask after his immortal soul.

NANCE (*fumbling miserably with churn*)

Yiss, Mrs. Thomas, an' thank you.

MEGAN THOMAS

Good afternoon, Mrs. Rhys.

NANCE

Good afternoon, Mrs. Thomas. (*Megan Thomas goes out knitting fast and furiously. Nance faces towards the windows, pauses, sighs, and then slowly opens the windows. Sadly*) Lad, Mrs. Thomas has been here an' Mrs. Thomas has gone.

[*Ladles butter slowly out of churn into a large crock of fresh water.*

SILVAN

Well, dearie, do ye think I didn't know Mrs. Thomas was here? Did she not cough her way to the door?

NANCE (*pouring off water from dish and covering butter with fresh water, she begins to work it once more with the paddle*)

Aye, then ye know.

SILVAN

She'd crack the gates of heaven with that voice an' cough of hers.

NANCE (*patiently*)

'Tis a voice hard to bear.

SILVAN

Mam, dear, I can see she has been makin' you unhappy tellin' ye everythin' that did not happen an' never will.

NANCE (*pouring off water again and refilling dish with fresh water*)

She has been tellin' me about Harry James's funeral —

SILVAN

Nance, she has a cracked bell for every tooth, an' they jingle, jingle, jingle, jingle.

NANCE (*lifting her apron to wipe her eyes*)

Yiss, so they do, but —

SILVAN

Och, mam, I am just teasin' ye!

NANCE

Aye, Father.

SILVAN

An' ye were thinkin' of me the while, now weren't ye?

NANCE

'Twas a wonderful funeral an' even that bad man died with verses on his lips.

SILVAN

Did he so: well, the man had need to, drinkin' an' carryin' on as he did.

NANCE

But, lad, there's been others, too.

SILVAN

Aye, dearie, I heard Megan whinin' them off for my entertainment. I'm no deaf.

[*The merriment leaves his eyes.*

NANCE

This butter is ready for saltin'.

SILVAN

Come here to the window, mam. (*She goes over, puts one hand, after she has wiped it off, through the window to him, and stands there frankly looking her love at him. Silvan takes her hand and holds it*) I see how 'tis. Ye are ambitious for me?

NANCE (*turning her face away from him for a minute*)

Yiss, lad, I am, — always. Ye have so long been the cleverest man in Rhyd Ddu, an' the handsomest an' the kindest, an' nothin' is too fine for ye.

SILVAN

An' you the best wife ever man had, an' I have ever done what I could for ye.

NANCE

Lad, there's no woman ever had a better man nor I have.

SILVAN

Nor a better son.

NANCE (*turning her head away agair*

Yiss, but lad, lad, I'm thinkin' all the time of what's comin'.

SILVAN

Nance, I'm thinkin' of it all the while, too. But I'm no afraid, only for ye.

NANCE

But, lad, she said —

SILVAN

Dearie, ye are no to believe everythin' ye hear. Megan Thomas has a good memory, an' it takes a good memory to tell lies. I said 'twas no everybody dies repeatin' Bible verses.

NANCE

Yiss, Silvan, but Harry James did say those words on the card, an' all the time he never was a good man. But ye, darlin', have been so good for all your teasin' an' fun.

SILVAN

Tut, Nance, now when I am goin' ye are wantin' me to have more honor among the neighbors than anyone else.

NANCE (*looking all her love at him*)

Aye, I am. An' even that could never be enough.

SILVAN

Ye are wishin' me to promise to say some text at the end?

NANCE

Yiss.

SILVAN

Would it comfort ye very much, mam?

NANCE

Yiss, more than I can say.

SILVAN

What text?

NANCE (*repeating text slowly*)

"Let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many."

SILVAN

The words are sad, mam.

NANCE

Yiss, they are sad.

SILVAN

Too sad whatever! I have always been merry.

NANCE

But could ye no say them?

SILVAN

They are over sad.

NANCE

But, lad dear, that verse would give ye a position in the eyes of folk like Megan Thomas would outshine all —

SILVAN (*with a wry smile*)

Ye mean all the other twenty-six hangin' on the wall, yiss?

NANCE

Yiss.

SILVAN

I'm no carin' for that kind of shinin' whatever. I prefer the sunlight. Aye, mam, 'tis wonderful livin', — even the little things like our shinin' brass pots an' kettles an' the salt glistenin' on many a flitch of bacon. We have sat on either side of the same —

[*Breathes heavily, gasps.*

NANCE

Lad dear, is it the pain?

SILVAN

Yiss, but 'tis no matter. 'Tis goin' now. I'm no wantin' to think of pain, mam, — only of ye now, an' the boy. We have sat about the same table year after year, — the soft heavy wind blowin' the smoke from our chimney an' over the hills. Shoni is out there now racin' towards us. Aye, ye have been good to me an' life has been good to me. I have no been sad, dearie, an' I'm no wantin' to go sayin' sad words at the end.

NANCE (*in low tones*)

Then what words, darlin'?

SILVAN (*pauses thinking, and says in a quiet voice*)

"In the shadow of thy wings I will rejoice."

NANCE (*her face falling a little*)

Will they no be thought over gay?

SILVAN

They are God's words. An' despite all our blunders an' our sins an' our tears an' even our sorrows, God must be happy.

NANCE

Aye well, lad darlin', they're good words indeed.

SILVAN

They are like the bright feathers from the pheasant's wing Shoni may bring me to-day.

NANCE (*resignedly*)

The words are over-cheerful, it may be, but Holy Writ. (*In the distance is heard the winding of a coach horn*) 'Tis Shoni!

[*The horn blows again.*

SILVAN

He must be far up the valley. (*The bugle blows again*) 'Tis a cheerful sound, — good music for the road.

NANCE

Isn't he late today?

SILVAN

Yiss, the old clock says he is all of fifteen minutes late.

NANCE

Well, he will no be loiterin'.

SILVAN (*thoughtfully*)

Nay, but the valley must be beautiful now, — the bees ever preferred it to Paradise, an' the flowers, too.

NANCE

Nevertheless he will no be loiterin'!

[*Going to her bench, picking up the jug of buttermilk, fetching a mug.*

SILVAN

'Twould be a pity for him to hasten to reach a sick old man.

NANCE

I must have his buttermilk ready for him, an' his scones an' some of the fresh butter.

[*Pours out a big mug full.*

SILVAN

Aye, the buttermilk looks like cream, mam, only better.

NANCE

Could ye drink a bit, dad?

SILVAN

Just a taste, darlin'. I was always likin' your buttermilk better nor any other drink a man could have!

NANCE (*pouring him out a glass which Silvan takes in a trembling hand*)

Here 'tis, dad, an' good for the health whatever.

SILVAN (*holding it up*)

'Tis one of the beautiful things to eat an' drink God has given us, like the honey the bees make from heather, like fresh spring water, like the tender green of salad, like the brown of new-baked loaves, — yiss, yiss, God has given us many things to make us glad. (*Drinks*) Aye, mam, 'tis wonderful, — I never drank better. (*Settles back peacefully in chair. The bugle blows again*) Is that the lad comin' now?

NANCE

Yiss, I can hear the clatter of the horses' hoofs. (*There is short finale from the horn*) He is tellin' us he's here.

SILVAN (*straightening up eagerly*)

I'm no wantin' the boy to think I'm too old an' ill.

NANCE

He will come runnin' as soon as he has tossed the letters to the Postmaster.

SILVAN

He will come runnin'.

NANCE

Will he bring somethin' for ye today?

SILVAN

I dunno, — maybe a shinin' stone from a brook, or a feather from a bird's wing, or a bit of strange bark. Aye, the lad's in love with life as I was, — as I am! (*Sound of a voice singing*) He's singin'.

NANCE

There! I hear his foot on the path!

SILVAN

Aye, he comes runnin'.

NANCE

He never has more than a moment.

SILVAN

He saves every moment for us.

[*In runs a lovely figure, gallant in top boots, a coachman's top hat, buff coachman's clothes edged with scarlet, the shining horn slung from his shoulder. He is slender, tall, fair-haired, with fine regular features, a look of health and goodness about him. In one hand he carries some golden feathers; in the other his driving whip. Shoni goes straight up to his mother, puts his right arm, driving whip and all, about her, and kisses her.*

SHONI

Mam, how's dad? Is he inside?

NANCE

Sittin' up there in the window waitin' for ye, dear.

SILVAN

Aye, lad, up today an' feelin' better.

SHONI (*turning quickly*)

Dad, here's the sun for ye. (*Shows feathers*)

SILVAN (*taking feathers*)

Aye, a wing gold as the sun!

SHONI (*fumbling in his pockets*)

Found on the hill's top where a proper wing should be. (*Finds what he is looking for*) Here 'tis: a book of poems.

SILVAN

A book of poems, well indeed!

[*Takes it smiling; laying the feathers beside him.*

NANCE

Here, lad, is your buttermilk.

[*Shoni takes it and drinks it in a long, hungry draught. Then wiping his mouth with a huge handkerchief he pulls out, hands the mug back to his mother.*

SHONI

Aye, mam, 'twas never cooler, never better to the taste!

NANCE

I will fetch your scones for ye to eat an' ye can take another mug of buttermilk, yiss?

SHONI

Nay, mam, I was late reachin' Rhyd Ddu, an' I must be startin' back now in a minute.

NANCE (*turning to go into the cottage*)

Then I will put butter on the scones an' wrap them up for ye to take with ye.

[*She goes in.*

SILVAN

Shoni!

SHONI

Aye, dad.

SILVAN

Come here to me, boy.

[*Shoni goes over to him and stands close to the window.*

SHONI

What is it, Father?

SILVAN

Which of these two Bible verses do ye like the better: "Let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many," or "In the shadow of thy wings I will rejoice."

SHONI (*thinking*)

Say it again, dad.

SILVAN

"Let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many," or "In the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice."

SHONI

The happy one, dad.

SILVAN

But your mam thinks those words might be thought over gay.

SHONI

So is the sunshine gay an' God made it.

SILVAN

Aye, lad, we'll see!

SHONI

See what, dad?

SILVAN

I am lookin' towards the end, lad. Each time ye come runnin' to me I'm no forgettin' it may be the last time.

SHONI

Nay, dad, do not say that!

SILVAN

Ye have been a good son to us, boy. You an' your mother have I loved as only a man can love wife an' child.

SHONI (*taking his hat off and standing there quietly*)

Yiss, dad, I know it.

SILVAN

I am startin' soon, lad, on my journey of all days. To you I leave your mother. Prefer her above all. Take care of her as ye have seen me try to do. Let her want for nothin'. Make her as the days go by as happy as ye can.

SHONI

Father, I will.

SILVAN (*reaching out a shaking old hand and placing it on Shoni's head*) Thank you, boy, for that promise. From the plans ye make for livin', never

omit her. Better to suffer a little yourself, lad, — even better to set aside for a time your own ways, — than to deprive those who love ye of their faith in life.

SHONI

Aye, Father.

SILVAN

Give me your forehead to kiss, lad. (*He kisses the boy's forehead earnestly*) Beautiful ye are to us. God bless you!

SHONI

An' God bless you, Father.

SILVAN

Try to be happy, my boy, in life an' in the hour of death. Better ye cannot do for others than to make them happy.

SHONI

Yiss, dad, happy I will be for your sake an' for mam's, an' because livin' is a good gift.

SILVAN

There, lad, she's comin' with the scones for ye. She's just out of the kitchen.

[*Nance comes out with package of scones in her hand.*

NANCE

Here, son, with the fresh butter on them.

SHONI (*stooping to kiss her good-by*)

Aye, mam, an' I am hungry for them. But I must be runnin' now, for 'tis late.

SILVAN

Then go, lad.

SHONI

Good-by, dad, till tomorrow.

SILVAN

Maybe, lad. God bless you!

SHONI (*turning to his mother*)

Tomorrow, mam darlin', at the same time. Good-by. (*Turning to father*) Good-by, dad.

[*Slips his hat from his head, looks at them both for a second, replaces his hat, turns and runs out singing:*

"The bright hours return, and the blue sky
is ringing
With song, and the hills are all mantled with
bloom."

SILVAN (*as Shoni's voice grows more distant*)

Like the light he is.

NANCE

Beautiful he is! To me there is only one dearer than he.

SILVAN (*sighing*)

Yiss, mam, an old sick man. (*Resolutely turns over pages of book*) 'Tis a wonderful little book he brought me, mam. Already I have found in it Rees Prichard's Candle of the Welsh, lines by Davydd ap Gwilym, pages from Taliesin's prophecy an' the laws of Hywel the Good about the place of the bard, — dear, dear, it must be the Welsh were born singin'.

NANCE

Aye, well, you an' Shoni were born singin' whatever!

SILVAN

Yiss, an' holdin' a harp to their breast.

NANCE

I recall a line my father used to repeat at all Eisteddfodau from Hywel the Good: "The harp he shall never part with."

(*Sharp and clear comes the winding of a horn*)

He is off now.

SILVAN

Aye, the coach is startin'!

NANCE

He's turnin' into the Pass now.

SILVAN

Yiss, the last farewell to —

[*Silvan catches at his heart and breathes with difficulty.*

NANCE

Och, dad, is it the pain?

[*Goes in to him.*

SILVAN (*speaking in gasps*)

Yiss, 'tis nothin', 'tis only the pain.

NANCE

Father, ye'll no forget?

SILVAN (*still gasping*)

Aye, dearie, I'm to be sayin' that ye — have the faith an' I — I have the works?

NANCE

Och, lad dear, do not jest!

SILVAN

There, mam, I am just teasin' ye — I —

NANCE

But, lad, it might be soon.

SILVAN (*his breath cramping suddenly. He tries to lean towards her, he gasps*)

Mam, closer!

NANCE (*bending her head and putting her arm about him*)

Dad dear, och, ye are sufferin'!

SILVAN (*each word coming more faintly*)

Aye — mam — ye — are a darlin', an' — an' I'll no forget — now I —

NANCE (*holding him closer*)

There, lad, try —

SILVAN (*struggling to speak, and lifting the feathers*)

"In — the — in — the — sha-dow —"

[*Silvan casts one imploring look up at Nance, his lips continue to struggle for speech, the feathers flutter from his hand, his gaze slips away, and he crumples up in her arms. In the distance Shoni's horn sounds, a faint, far-away call, repeated, then repeated. From near by comes a short hard cough, and the sound of footsteps and voices. Nance looks up, listens dazed to the approaching sounds, then leans out and draws the windows to. Megan Thomas, Gladys Owen, and Morto Griffith enter.*

MEGAN THOMAS

When I was here this mornin' he was behind those closed windows there singin' light songs an' dyin'!

GLADYS OWEN (*kindly*)

He was ever merry, Mrs. Thomas. When would he have more need to be merry than when he is ill?

MEGAN THOMAS

Yiss, Mrs. Owen, but 'twas a gay catch, — somethin' about love!

MORTO GRIFFITH (*wagging his head mournfully*)

Ffi, love an' dyin'! A-goin' on the downfall at the very last, — up to the last a-caperin' an' a-dancin' like a fox in the moonlight.

GLADYS OWEN (*looking about anxiously*)

There, there, Morto Griffith! He's been a kind man, a very kind man! (*Looks about*) I am wonderin' where Nance can be.

MEGAN THOMAS

Did ye hear that godless horn blowin' its light music up the valley?

GLADYS OWEN

Yiss, Mrs. Thomas, 'twas Shoni, I'm thinkin'. Each day just before he turns into the Pass he blows that good-by to his Father and Mother.

MORTO GRIFFITH (*wagging his head and picking up Nance's churning vessels*)

Mrs. Owen, mam, the boy would always follow Silvan about like a puppy, — 'tisn't natural. Such disorder!

GLADYS OWEN

'Tisn't natural for some sons, Morto Griffith. But so would Nance follow him wherever he went an' whatever he wanted. I'm no wantin' a better testimony to the goodness of a father than that his son should love him.

MEGAN THOMAS (*coughing harshly*)

It all depends on the kind of love whatever.

GLADYS OWEN

When Shoni goes he is thinkin' of when he'll get back — I'm wonderin' where Nance can be?

MORTO GRIFFITH

I dunno, but wherever *he* is, he's an infiddle.

[*He shakes his head to and fro and grunts and groans.*

MEGAN THOMAS (*between coughs*)

Yiss, that's it, — an infiddle, an infiddle.

GLADYS OWEN (*with some heat*)

Mrs. Thomas, if I am havin' to choose between an infiddle that's merry an' full of the joy of livin' an' a saint that has never had a light heart nor a kind word, I will take the infiddle whatever, an' be glad to get him!

MORTO GRIFFITH (*shaking his head and looking at Gladys Owen sternly*)

Dear me, dear me, Rhyd Ddu is not what it used to be in principles whatever, Mrs. Owen!

GLADYS OWEN

Is it so! Well, to my way of thinkin', there's principle enough in havin' a little fun an' bein' as merry as one can.

[*Turns toward window; then goes up to door and knocks on lintel.*

MORTO GRIFFITH (*scandalized*)

Dear me! dear me! Mrs. Owen, mum.

GLADYS OWEN (*calling*)

Mrs. Rhys, where are you?

[*Nance comes to the door, wiping the tears from her eyes, and stands propped against the lintel, her breast heaving.*

NANCE

I heard you, but —

GLADYS OWEN (*compassionately*)
Och, dear, is he gone already?
[*There is no reply, — only the effort Nance makes to speak.*
MEGAN THOMAS (*pious and hateful*)
Were his last words —
NANCE (*controlling herself, her voice courageous, proud*)
Aye, these were his words: "In the shadow of thy wings I will rejoice."

(1)

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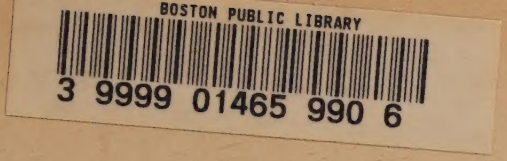

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